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FIRST THINGS

November 1994
Number 47

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

Educating Father Abraham: The Meaning of Wife
Leon R. Kass

The Second Coming of C. S. Lewis
Alan Jacobs

On Bringing One's Life to a Point
Gilbert Meilaender

The Church-State Game: A Symposium on Kiryas Joel
William Bentley Ball ❖ Douglas Laycock
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A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

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Choosing Choice

John E. Coons ("Is Choice Still Choice?" August/September) writes that polls show support for choice in education. The more sophisticated polls, however, show that while the public strongly supports choice within public education, it equally opposes public support for nonpublic schools.

Furthermore, Mr. Coons makes no mention of the most significant difference between public and nonpublic schools: the vast majority of nonpublic schools are pervasively denominational institutions, while public schools approach the ideal of religious neutrality required by the Constitution and our religious pluralism.

Mr. Coons says that a voucher plan must neither increase public spending by more than about one percent nor reduce public spending for public schools. These goals are not reconcilable. With 10 percent of our children in nonpublic schools, public spending would have to go up by at least 10 percent, plus a great deal more to pay for transportation.

Elizabeth Randall
Aspen Hill, MD

John E. Coons replies:

Ms. Randall's "more sophisticated" polls are unknown to me. Since the early 1970s, the Gallup poll has indicated a steady shift from majority opposition to majority support for the choice she deplores. A 1992 poll by Gallup asked this question: "Suppose the Supreme Court rules that it is constitutional for state or federal governments to provide some public financial support for parents who choose religious-affiliated schools. Would you favor or oppose your state or federal government providing such support?" The response: 64.2 percent favored; 32.8 percent opposed. The strongest support was found among poor and minority respondents. These results are consistent with the many other polls I have seen or helped to design. Unless one were to limit the sample to very high income suburban enclaves, this would be the pattern to anticipate. Whether a well-designed proposal would be politically successful is, of course, a very different question. The point is that ordinary people want choice.

As for the risk of increased cost, it should be understood that the average private school runs on a bit more than half what is spent on public schools. A scholarship worth, say, 60 percent of the public cost would break even or even *save* money on the one assumption that a substantial number of children would move from the expensive public schools to the more frugal private schools. The polls suggest that precisely this would happen.

As for the private schools being mostly "denominational," Ms. Randall gets this right. I have been unable to locate any study suggesting that private religious schools turn out a disproportionate number of intolerant dimwits. Indeed, all the evidence is that their graduates vote, pay taxes, and stay out of jail with remarkable regularity.

Tradition and Truth

In his "A Tale of Two Stanleys" (June/July), Alan Jacobs applauds distinctions made by Alasdair MacIntyre between the relativism and perspectivism of modernity and something called a "kind of rationality possessed by traditions" (in MacIntyre's words).

This distinction troubles me, for I fail to see the difference. I see that the rationality of perspectives is opposed to the rationality of traditions, but how does the latter escape the problems of the former? To reason from the perspective of one of several traditions is no less relative than to reason from one of several nontraditional perspectives.

Traditions provide competing perspectives. How do they avoid relativity? Is it because one tradition "believes in Truth with a capital T," as Professor Jacobs contends, thereby ranking its own tradition as the truth, others as falling short of the truth? But relativism says the same:

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its appeal is that it is a truth larger than other merely incomplete perspectives. It is the final perspective, the horizonless horizon.

My sense is that MacIntyre's solution to the problem of relativism is an instance of intellectual sleight of hand, or purely rhetorical, or both (i.e., postmodern). It works especially well for religious types. By speaking of the rationality possessed by traditions from a religious perspective, which he tends to do, MacIntyre simply moves from the perspectives of nonreligious points of view to those of religious points of view, and his audience, warm as it is to religion, takes comfort in the maneuver, thinking warmly of its own religion.

Where's the *philosophic* advance?

Bill Johnston, Jr.
Pt. Richmond, CA

Alan Jacobs replies:

I do not understand all of Mr. Johnston's comments. For instance, I do not know what he means by "the rationality of perspectives," or what the word "moves" connotes in his penultimate sentence. I also suspect that he uses the word "perspective" too loosely.

But I take the substance of his concern to lie in this sentence: "To reason from the perspective of one of several traditions is no less relative than to reason from one of several nontraditional perspectives." If MacIntyre's work has accomplished anything, it is to establish that there are *no* "nontraditional perspectives": every philosophical position is a product of one "tradition of inquiry" or another. The idea that one can escape from traditions is delusive.

Therefore, MacIntyre argues, the first necessary step toward productive argument comes when all parties admit that none of them can occupy some intellectual ground that is independent of tradition and thus capable of judging traditions from the outside or from above. For MacIntyre, the chief liability of both relativism and perspectivism is their refusal to acknowledge that this is the case. It seems to me, then, that Mr. Johnston is unaware of MacIntyre's use of the word "tradition," and assumes that MacIntyre is paying a compliment when he says that a position is "traditional."

What distinguishes MacIntyre from perspectivists and relativists is not that he believes his position to be true, while they do not. Everyone believes his or her position to be right: that's what it means to hold a position, whether the relativist position or any other. MacIntyre's distinctive belief is that philosophical inquiry does not have to be tradition-independent in order to be rational. One can believe that there is no extra-traditional vantage point from which to conduct an argument, *and also* believe that some traditions can be shown to be superior, in various ways, to other traditions. Insofar as MacIntyre has demonstrated how this can be done, that's "the philosophic advance," I think.

Stay or Go?

Richard John Neuhaus says (Public Square, August/September) that the comment of the *Wanderer* that perhaps 70 percent of the clergy and 90 percent of the laity might leave the Catholic Church is "utter fantasy." He thinks American Catholics want to remain members of the Church.

I would like to agree with his statement; however, I have to conclude that the vast majority of American Catholics could well leave the Church. . . .

Most Catholics know that the Church forbids contraception; but they do not accept the teaching, and when they practice contraception, don't confess it. Surveys and personal experience further indicate that many Catholics do not hold to Church teaching on (a) the virgin birth, (b) the Real Presence, (c) abortion, and (d) punishment/reward after death. Quite a large number hold, at least implicitly, a form of religious indifferentism. Any serious sin against faith loses or weakens the gift of faith. Whether the sin is mate-

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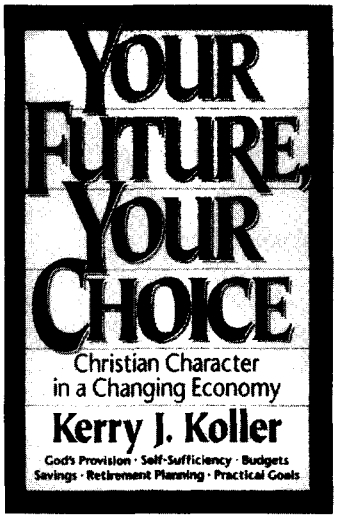
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rial or formal, it does have implications for the spiritual life of the individual. Many Catholics seem to be attached to the Church not through a faith commitment to the truth but through a cultural and emotional commitment to a comfortable rite and religion.

The fearful question: does Fr. Neuhaus honestly expect "Catholics" who have a difficult time following the Church's teaching on women's ordination or birth control to stand with the Pope when offered an alternative choice of "cultural Catholicism" in which anything goes, both dogmatically and morally? I would hope to say yes; but I fear the opposite to be true.

Clare J. Hendricks
U.S. Marine Corps
Catholic Chaplain
Cherry Point, NC

Unfair Swipe?

You may be right in taking a swipe at the *Wanderer* for rhetorical license in its preaching of loyalty to Rome by implying formal schism might be in the offing if the Holy Father is not successful in averting it.

But shouldn't "While We're At It" long before this have bowed respectfully to a publication that has for well over 100 years gone to the mat for the magisterium—to the extent, mind you, of losing five thousand subscriptions to a spin-off weekly rather than compromise that loyalty? . . .

I am very proud of my long attachment to the *Wanderer*. It has been a source of edification and comfort to me in my fifty-eight years in the priesthood. I don't take it kindly, as the saying goes, that you place it among the crazies.

Make the amends honorable and after a decent interval mention how good it is that the *Wanderer* places the words of the Holy Father on its front page every week.

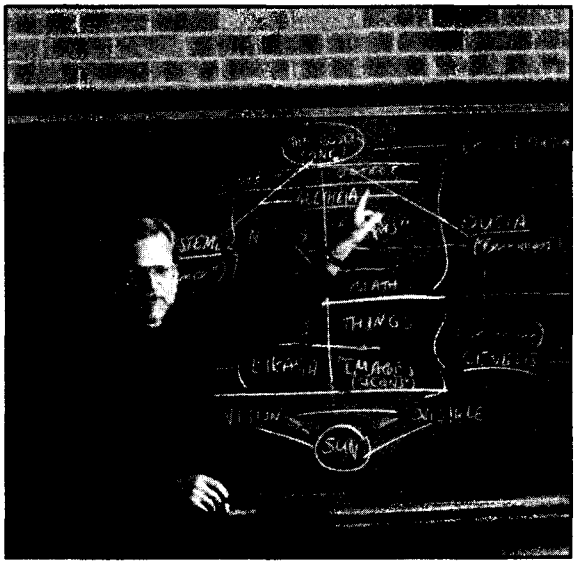
(The Rev.) Thomas Regis Murphy
Pittsburgh, PA

Richard John Neuhaus replies:
To criticize a comment is not to consign a publication to "the crazies." With no interval at all I am pleased to go on record as saying it is very good that the *Wanderer* runs John Paul II on every week's front page.

On Military Power

I would like to commend A. J. Bacevich ("The Illusions of Military Power," June/July) for an outstanding essay on the relationship (or lack thereof) between military power and the strength of the nation it serves.

Many years ago my Ottoman history professor made the sage observation that fish and empires always begin to rot at the head. While the splendid military formations of the Ottoman Empire were at the gates of Vienna, the Sultans were having the born and unborn children of rivals slaughtered. That axiom fits very well today. We have a President de-



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void of any moral bearings whatsoever, and a military establishment still morally intact but being undermined by Administration initiatives designed to pay off political debts to left-wing ideological groups.

And while traditional Americans may be changing their view of the efficacy of the projection of military power, I hope they understand that the military establishment—whatever its faults—is one of the last reservoirs of institutional traditional values, a point made by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen many years ago in a speech to West Point cadets.

As a member of the military for thirty years and as a civilian instructor of military officers for the last five, I have observed a widening chasm between the young soldiers and the moral nomads who constitute a large part of the civilian society.

It is not a panacea, but it would be a tremendous countercultural step in the right direction to reinstitute the draft. Just for these young men to observe the meaning of responsibility and fidelity would be a major revelation to a generation absorbing the mores of "Melrose Place" and "Northern Exposure."

Norvell B. De Atkine
Fayetteville, NC

An objective look at the anti-Vietnam War movement would explode A. J. Bacevich's stereotypes of those who opposed American military intervention. I was among the hundreds of thousands of Americans who protested the war and was part of Senator Eugene McCarthy's youth brigade. During an antiwar march on the Pentagon our members included housewives, nuns, veterans in uniform, blue-collar workers, students, and other "normal" Americans. The media fixed on one small band of scruffy, disruptive radicals carrying Viet Cong flags. Among those who actively protested our military intervention in Vietnam were Generals Matthew Ridgeway, James Gavin, and former Marine Corps Commandant David Shoup. Does Mr. Bacevich believe that these generals and heroes of WW II were antimilitary?

During the Vietnam War I enlisted in the U.S. Navy. Many of us in the service thought the war was a mistake. We believed that the Saigon government was a corrupt leftover of French colonialism, and not worth killing and dying for. We also rejected the domino theory. The ready collapse of the Saigon government and the failure of communism to spread have proven us right.

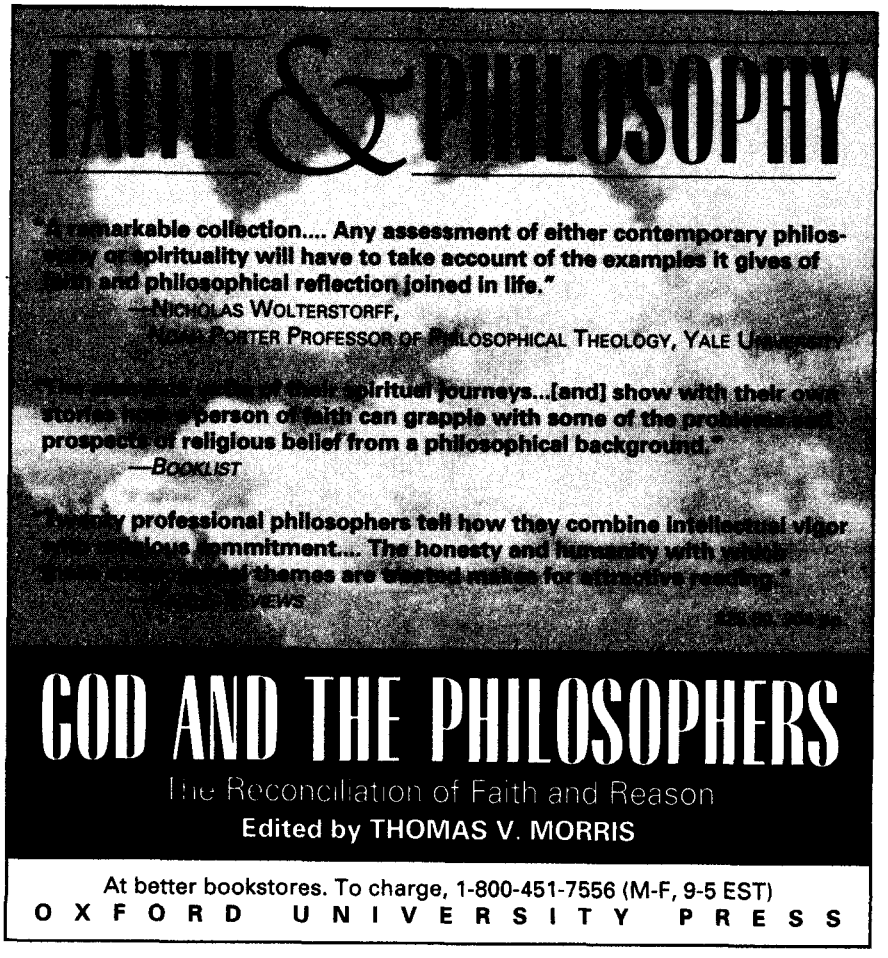
Leland Gamson
Marion, IN

Catholics & Evangelicals (Cont.)

As I read through "Evangelicals & Catholics Together" (May), I was amazed at the compromising attitude of the Catholic participants toward Evangelicals. The declaration indicated no intention of the Evangelicals involved joining the Catholic Church. We Catholics then waste our time on them instead of going where converts are possible. As far as the two groups working together, this has been the case ever since our country won its freedom. They worked together to build a great America, having like ideals of high morals and integrity.

But the general use of the word "Christian" causes much doubt in my mind. Who is meant? Are Catholics simply to coexist with Evangelicals? They no doubt have part of the Truth, but know nothing of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Sacraments, or other doctrines of the Catholic Church. Why lump us together as though we were alike? The essentials are missing in their religion. We are Catholic. Please distinguish.

We are promised that the Holy Spirit will be with the Catholic Church until the end of time, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Protestants are not one with the Catholic Church. Their founders broke away from the Catholic Church. Christ commanded us to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go out and evangelize the rest of the world, to bring non-Catholics into the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. The Catholic Church does not compromise its doctrine to accommodate Protestants—or shouldn't. You would almost think that some bishops and priests never learned their own Catechism. . . .

Sister Winifred Bauer, C.PP.S.
O'Fallon, MO

The unofficial document "Evangelicals & Catholics Together," which to many came as a bolt out of the blue, likely will prove to be helpful. It presents us with the spiritual fruit of theological maturation by both parties. Recognition of abiding differences is made plain. The statement holds to those fundamental doctrines under which Catholics and Evangelicals stand testifying to that which is believed, "everywhere, always, and by all."

I wish to raise an appeal, however, for hard thinking about traditional Christian views of public life by readers of this document elsewhere around the globe. As a Southern Baptist theologian, both Protestant and religiously disestablishmentarian, I am very conscious of the fact that much of Roman Catholicism remains anti-Protestant and religiously establishmentarian. For example, some papal statements on "Re-evangelization" in Latin America at the beginning of this decade were rather antagonistic to the evangelical movement throughout that region. While many Evangelicals tend to respect expressions of allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church in evangelistic encounter, they cannot help but seek to mediate spiritual awakening to nominal adherents of any denomination along side of the unevangelized. This intent is not well respected by many of our Catholic brethren in Latin America, especially among the hierarchy. The recent address by Bishop Sinealo Bohn in March to the thirty-first National Conference of Bishops in Brazil in calling his church to "declare a holy war" against a host of evangelical denominations is a case in point.

Thus, acknowledging joyfully the numerous points in common presented in this document consonant with many personal relationships, I must confess deep reservations on behalf of my evangelical brethren in regions where this distinctly American Christian experience is not their own. Globally, they frequently encounter a virulent nationalistic Catholicism that is actually quite fundamentalist in the world-religious sense. This phenomenon, however, bears only superficial similarity to American Protestant fundamentalism, which was a reaction to the loss of cultural hegemony after the turn of this century. But if separatist, anti-intellectual Protestant fundamentalism is to be checked by Christian cooperation in America, by the same token and for perhaps more compelling reasons establishmentarian, antidemocratic Catholic fundamentalism is to be restrained by Christian cooperation in the rest of the world.

Kurt A. Richardson
Southeastern Baptist
Theological Seminary
Wake Forest, NC

Religious Sanctions

Peter J. Leithart has touched on something very fundamental in his call for a restoration of sanctions within the various Christian communities ("The Very Modern Christian Right," May). This is true not only in what he says about the use of corrective measures themselves, but also in what he suggests about authorities' dedication to their vocation when they are willing (or unwilling) to use sanctions to try to restore Christian morals.

This is one of those nitty-gritty issues that people like to shove under the rug. When Pastor Leithart remarks that there will not be "an easy way out of the political impasse," he is certainly not overstating the situation. I have seen how, for example, suggestions for a restoration of commonsense discipline within Catholic religious orders is greeted with incredulity and disdain (unless it comes from lawyers trying to protect deep pockets).

For Catholics, I think the unwillingness of authority to use the measures suggested by Pastor Leithart—censure, rebuke, and excommunication—has had the effect of weakening the Church's authority. The media love to dwell on the fact, for example, that former Supreme Court Justice William Brennan is in good standing with his bishop and pastor. . . . Similarly, I think of the late Tip O'Neill, Speaker of the House of Representatives; did he ever receive any correction for his lack of support for the Right to Life cause or his support of Democratic Party platforms that championed abortion? If he had received some public censure, as called for, from his pastor, I would be surprised—and pleased that the priest was doing his duty.

Thomas Norton
Dillwyn, VA

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This Time

School's Out

James Nuechterlein

This fall Valparaiso University decided (not unreasonably) that five-and-a-half years of leave of absence is enough, and so I find myself for the first time since 1964 unattached to a university faculty. I am no longer Professor of American Studies and Political Thought, and the adjustment will take some getting used to. Yet while I put off as long as possible making the final break (no one in his right mind lightly gives up tenure), the decision, when it had to be made, was not all that difficult. I wish that it were harder than it is to say farewell to the academy.

Not that I leave with bitterness or resentment. Ever since I went off to college in the fall of 1956, I have been either a student or professor, and it has been, all in all, a wonderful life. To those of us too weak to dig and too proud to beg, the university provides a splendid refuge. We spend our time reveling in ideas and indulging in intellectual fancies, and—wonder of wonders—we get paid for it. There are, for those who have known it at its best, few joys that can exceed the joy of teaching. You lecture, and you see students' eyes light up; you lead a seminar, and you guide eager young men and women into the complexities of ideas that seem to you at that moment as important as anything can be. It is a grace for which one will forever be grateful.

Why, then, is it so easy to walk away? In large part, it's time. When I first started teaching, I was determined above all else that I would not become one of those burnt-out cases that had been the bane of my undergraduate experience: professors who had not had a new idea in years, whose yellowed lecture notes testified to an ossification of thought that had occurred a long time earlier. There are few things more depressing than watching a professor, long-since devoid of inspiration or enthusiasm, marking time toward the day of retirement.

It hadn't happened to me yet, but I saw the signs. You've anticipated all their questions. You have to work harder every class period to generate the enthusiasm within yourself that once came naturally and that is the necessary engine of successful teaching. The students are strangers to you now, and not all that interesting strangers at that. Their attitude of I dare you to interest me—once a source of challenge—is now a cause of resentment, and that is death to teaching. Their ignorance grows worse year by year, and you despair at filling in the unfathomable gaps of their knowledge. How can they understand, if there is so little substance on which understanding can be based?

And the grading: that's where real despair takes hold. The essays, on the average, are now borderline literate: you're engaged in remedial education. This is not a sentence; the subject does not agree with the verb; this point does not follow from what preceded it; your pronoun has no reference; your argument has no sense. All this preparatory to getting to the presumed topic of the essay or exam. Once you took it all in stride, now you wonder if there is not a more honest way to make a living.

At elite schools, or even in the honors programs of nonelite schools, it's not that bad. It can, in fact, be quite stimulating, still a marvelous grace. But even so, it's a grace best left, by and large, to young instructors. They nourish it best, and they benefit most from it. Seasoned scholars should, if they can, turn their primary energies to other things.

And many do. They do research. A few accomplish admirable things: they genuinely expand knowledge and understanding. Many others do no harm, and even some good. Others do what is necessary to obtain credentials. Still others perpetrate nonsense, pernicious or merely frivolous.

I was never, I must confess, a good researcher. I hadn't the disposition for it. More than that, it was not what I most wanted intellectually to do. I wanted to write, but not what the university wanted me to write. It mattered infinitely more to me to place an article in *Commentary* or *American Scholar* than in *Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives*. The problem was that the latter was a "refereed journal" and so suitable for mention on my report to the Dean on academic endeavor; the former were not "refereed" and thus beyond academic ken. The evidence accumulated that my generalist intellectual interests did not accord with the norms of the academy.

And then there was, of course, the mounting problem of political correctness. To talk of PC by now is to induce MEGO. Truth be told, the situation is not as desperate as the most lurid accounts would suggest. The lunatics have not fully—or at least not everywhere—taken control of the asylum. Good and sensible teaching continues; useful and non-ideologically-driven research takes place. But things are quite bad enough (see, for example, the articles elsewhere in this issue by Mona Scheuermann and Gilbert Meilaender). It truly is the case that the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity. Moderates "do their own work," while studiously ignoring—and most carefully not opposing—the intellectual depredations of the cultural thought police.

My own situation in the academy, as someone roughly categorized as a neoconservative, was more dispiriting than intimidating. My superiors protected

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me (with varying degrees of enthusiasm) and my colleagues tolerated me (with some quite vigorous exceptions), but never did the need to explain myself cease. ("He doesn't drool or twitch, and we haven't yet caught him pulling wings off flies, so why does he have such impossible ideas?") After a while you get tired.

In the end, though, I am leaving the academy not because it is a bad place but because I have found a better place. First Things and the Institute on Religion and Public Life have provided an intellectual home more congenial than any I have known. The work is more consistently stimulating—and demanding; you can't mentally relax in the way you are tempted to when dealing with nineteen-year-olds. And the percentage of parsed sentences among FT contributors is markedly higher than among college sophomores. Not to mention that no one around here finds my ideas strange.

So it's farewell to the academy. No regrets over the years spent there, but—tenure aside—no tears on leaving, either. FT

Waiting in Advent

Is like the time you drove back from Milwaukee,
culture-sated with ballet, one respectable
responsible drink inside, and found yourself
halfway through the ninety minutes

with only ten more of wakefulness to spend,
that creeping sense, as your companion dozes
on the seat beside you, that not a thing
can return your senses to where they were

just ten miles before: not the radio, not
the cold whip of wind against your ears
from the unrolled window, not the songs
you strain for from albums you've memorized;

The fear is never sudden; it rises in you—
like the fog which smothers the car
that was just there a minute ago—
the third time you open your eyes

Not knowing how long they've been closed
or how much blacktop a car going sixty
could have covered in that time
or how soon it will happen again.

When you pull off at the EZ Mart
There's an old bearded guy in the john
Who advises ducking your head under the faucet:
"That'll bring you back to life," he says,

But it doesn't, and somewhere past Rosendale
you can't remember seeing it, or stopping
at the single four-way of that one-church town
that divides somewhere from nowhere,

Not really moving, just existing, enduring,
feeling it beyond your control now
whether the tire will catch the gravel
at the shoulder's edge and flick you

Beyond the living, or you'll arrive
before the garage door, the wash of relief
and fatigue settling in at once,
and so you sit there, blinking, watching,

with no other map but hope.

Greg Roper

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Opinion

Right Thinking About the Religious Right

David R. Carlin

It is amusing to see how alarmed all right-thinking people have become about that menacing phenomenon called "the Religious Right." They are "extremists," they are "out of the mainstream." They are without question a danger to the Republican Party and probably a menace to the Republic.

It is doubtful that there is evidence to prove any of these charges; one suspects that all they amount to is that right-thinking people find the Religious Right quite distasteful. Their logic goes something like this: "We are good, true, and beautiful. But we find you repulsive. Therefore there must be something very wrong with you." This reasoning is impeccable, given its first premise. But one must ask, is the premise correct? Are the right-thinking people really as good, true, and beautiful as they imagine themselves to be?

For the sake of argument, let us imagine that members of the Religious Right are as weird and frightening as their accusers allege. The question then arises: How did they get that way? About this question the right-thinkers have shown an odd lack of curiosity.

One is reminded of a similar lack of curiosity shown from the very first about McCarthyism—a phenomenon that truly was a menace to the Republic, though perhaps only a mild one. The term "McCarthyism," of course, refers not just to the activities of the Senator from Wisconsin but to the atmosphere of the late forties and early fifties in which many people were ready to find Reds and Pinkos under every liberal bed.

In the periodic retelling of the McCarthyism tale, mention is rarely made of the fact that during the thirties and forties there were great numbers of elite Americans—persons well-connected in Hollywood, in New York literary circles, and even in politics (witness the Henry Wallace campaign of 1948)—who belonged to one of three concentric circles: (a) a relatively small inner circle of Communists; (b) a much larger circle of Communist sympathizers; and (c) an outer circle even larger still, made up of people who, while neither Communists nor fellow travelers themselves, thought it morally respectable to be a fellow-traveler or even a Communist.

In other words, while Stalin was running one of the two worst dictatorships in the history of the human race (the other having been presided over by his sometime ally Hitler), murdering tens of millions of human beings, including many of his former Bolshevik comrades, here in America great numbers of privileged and influential citizens either supported communism or admired it or at least tolerated it in a benevolent and broad-minded manner.

Is it any wonder there was a backlash? And is it any wonder this backlash went too far, finally producing that repulsive creature from the black lagoon, Joe McCarthy?

But whose fault was this excessive backlash? Partly, to be sure, it was the fault of McCarthy and his hysterical supporters. But their culpability was secondary. Far greater was the responsibility of those who created the conditions for a backlash: those sophisticated Americans who understood something the vulgar masses could never hope to understand, namely, that the commandment "Thou shalt not murder" is only intended (as Leona Helmsley said about paying taxes) for the little people, whereas mass murder, though admittedly a nasty business, is virtuous when done by the right people for the right purposes.

The old French witticism—*"Cet animal est très méchant; quand on l'attaque, il se défend"* ("This animal is very wicked; when you attack it, it defends itself")—gives us a clue to the populist anti-Communism of the postwar era. It can also help us understand the rise of the populist Religious Right today.

For the past quarter century vast numbers of elite, privileged, sophisticated, and "right-thinking" Americans have exhibited contempt for certain fundamental values; and they have, if anything, exhibited even greater contempt for those religious traditionalists who hold them. Is it any wonder that after years of abuse the traditionalists have finally struck back?

It never occurs to the right-thinkers that they themselves are to blame for this backlash. Instead they deplore the "très méchant" nature of the Religious Right. And when charged with having been contemptuous of religious traditionalists and their values, they dismiss the charge as a silly slander.

"How could we—we of all people—be guilty of such a thing?" they ask. "You forget that we are the nonjudgmentalists, the multiculturalists, the virtuosi of diversity. We respect all value systems and all subcultural communities. After all, this is what makes us morally superior to everyone else (especially the Religious Right).

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"Of course there are limits even to our great tolerance, since we do not tolerate the intolerant. Thus we have no patience with those who oppose abortion, for we know their secret: they are haters of women and of freedom generally. And we have no patience with those who oppose same-sex marriage; they are homophobic bigots. Ditto those who oppose distribution of condoms in public schools; not only are they ostriches with heads in the sand, they are bigoted against the poor, against minorities, and generally against anyone who does not conform to their Ozzie-and-Harriet model of sexual propriety. And who could be more repressive and inhumane than the people who oppose euthanasia?

"Our profound respect for all people, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, etc., has led us to the conclusion that it is dangerous to believe that moral values are anything more than personal or group preferences; and we think it is especially dangerous to operate under the illusion that there exists some sort of absolute and God-given moral law. People who hold such retrograde views are fanatics who ought to be pushed to the margins of American society while we await their gradual extinction.

"As you can plainly see, then, we have no contempt for anyone or for anyone's values. How preposterous that we should be accused of such a thing. But it is typical of the Religious Right to engage in such misrepresentations.

"So we're sure you agree with us when we say that the Religious Right is a very wicked animal."

DAVID R. CARLIN, *a former Democratic member of the Rhode Island Senate, teaches sociology and philosophy at the Community College of Rhode Island.*

Letter to a Colleague

Mona Scheuermann

Dear _____,

It was a pleasure getting to see you again at the conference a few weeks ago. But something you asked me has been bothering me ever since. I didn't have the time to answer you properly—there was my plane to catch—but the seriousness, even urgency, in your question has stayed with me. And so, dear colleague, this letter. . . .

You asked me if I didn't think it absolutely necessary that before people marry, the "power" issues in their marriage should be settled. Your question, clearly meant to relate to real-life experience, came at the end of our session and grew out of the scholarly issues we'd been debating. The panel dealt with eighteenth-century views of marriage, and I had argued in my paper that women in eighteenth-century English novels are not all depicted as victims of hateful marriages, as so many feminist scholars lately have suggested, but that many different kinds of relationships are depicted and that many women—in works by both male and female authors—are shown as happy and functioning human beings. This perspective drew passionate disagreement during the question period. In response to an intense harangue from a woman in the audience, I listed a series of both fictional and real-life instances of delightfully successful marriages in the eighteenth century. I made the point that had all women been as miserable as some contemporary critics claim they were, we should expect to see evidence of widespread suicide and psychosis. We don't find this ubiquitous dysfunction, of course.

It was this discussion that prompted your question and provided context for it. Your intense concern with issues of "power" in marriage disturbs me because it seems to me that your ideas about what marriage is have been distorted by the rhetoric of your teachers, just as so much recent scholarship has produced distorted readings of the works being studied. And while it is unfortunate that much contemporary scholarship has emerged distorted from the feminist mirror, it seems quite tragic that a generation of young women, who like most students do not bring enough skepticism to the ideas of their teachers, may allow rhetoric to spoil their own real-life relationships with men. Reviewers and other scholars can correct for the biases of a given group of scholars, but the individual life that is changed by biased views presented as fact is more difficult to resurrect. It is unfortunate that so much feminist energy has gone into the building of the Woman as Victim image that contemporary young women feel first and foremost they must defend themselves in relationships.

No, dear colleague, the first thing you need to deal with in relationships with men is not "power issues." I would worry first about compatibility, shared interests, and love. The two-body problem (you'll both want jobs within commuting distance of each other) is a concern too. But "power" issues? There are so many kinds of power in any relationship that to insist on "solving" the power question in advance is not only irrelevant but impossible. I remind you that the person who cooks better than the other has "power," as does the one who can help the other make WordPerfect do its tricks. You take my point.

Feminism has done wonderful things for women—and for men. It is time, however, to challenge *some* of its manifestations and to do so without fear of being labeled anti-woman.

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For one problem with modern academic feminism is that any challenge even to its most bizarre manifestations is met with the accusation that the challenger is simply antifeminist. This is the best case. The worst case—that is, when the challenger is male—is automatically to accuse him of being a misogynist. This pigeonholing happens so often that for the most part male scholars either stay away from questions having to do with feminist criticism or, too often, support feminist work not from conviction but from fear. As with all critical schools, there is a fair amount of bad feminist criticism being published along with the good. And yet there are few reviews of these works that firmly point to their follies. There are some such reviews, of course, but they are virtually all written by women scholars. I have asked a number of male colleagues—some of them illustrious names in our field—why they are not willing to challenge criticism from the feminist corner. The answer is always the same: "I can't. You [as a woman] can." This refusal to challenge—for fear of being condemned as sexist—carries on into the larger academic community. American campuses have taken up male-bashing as the politically correct attitude.

From a male student's earliest days on campus, and even before, in the orientation materials he receives, the student is told to be very, very careful not only what he does but what he says; "rape," it would seem, can be verbal as well as physical, and can occur in a multitude of forms. The woman, of course, is told that she is likely to become a victim of all sorts of verbal and physical attacks, and that she may well be a victim even if she doesn't know it.

If a drunken male attacks a drunken female, for example, his actions are not to be excused on the ground that he is not in control. I agree, of course, that this is absolutely right: drunkenness is no excuse for brutality, violence, and rape. But why does the rhetoric hardly ever allow for the intoxicated woman, except to talk about what should not be done to her when she is unconscious? No woman should be so inebriated that she does not know what she is doing, just as no man should. Women used to be responsible for their own behavior. One wouldn't remain in a situation that was likely to get out of control. We did not expect others to safeguard us from our own stupidity. There are, to be sure, unfortunate situations that cannot be foreseen. Getting dead drunk in a frat house isn't one of them.

But in the current academic climate, it is the male as potential attacker who is center stage. Reading freshman orientation materials from university after university, I am led to wonder how any parent in good conscience can send a male child to an institution that labels him as potential attacker before he has ever met his first coed. "No means no," this literature trumpets—its assumption seems to be that without being intimidated by the school's administration, the young man probably would not heed a woman's negative. I think that academic administrators, still largely male, have been intimidated by feminist pressures. Like the scholar who is afraid to criticize a bad book, the administrator is afraid to combat the pressure to make the campus a gender-correct zone. The fury that greeted Katie Roiphe's recent *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus*—a book that in the current climate could not be written by a man—suggests how difficult it is to take a commonsense look at campus trends.

This atmosphere of female-male confrontation is inculcated on the campuses from freshman days on. By graduate school, sometimes out of commitment, sometimes because that's where the jobs are, many women choose gender-related studies as their academic specializations. These studies are shaped and supervised by feminist scholars who, too often, bring their own biases to the work they are supervising. In our own field, British eighteenth-century studies, there is a growth industry in dissertations and books about women. (Interestingly, but not surprisingly, very few of these dissertations and books are by men.) Under the pressure to produce "feminist" readings, many young scholars distort the authors and works they are writing about.

Fanny Burney, who must be called Frances by the Correct, has become a feminist author. In the last ten years, more than a dozen new books have been devoted to Burney or have major chapters on her. The only problem here is that Burney is a decidedly conservative writer. Not to worry: in a feminist reading, the delightful fairy tale of perfect Lord Orville marrying the charming and innocent heroine in Burney's *Evelina* is interpreted as a horror story. The "vill" in Orville really is a sign for "villain," you see, and Evelina's nuptial knot ties off her education and her budding life. It's not the book that Burney wrote, of course, but these critics don't let that inconvenience stand in their way. (And so, not inconsequentially, do they add to the roster of victims.)

Jane Austen, whose books are just as conservative as Burney's, comes in for the same kind of (re)reading. Poor Elizabeth Bennet: the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice* is to be quite destroyed when she marries the hero, Darcy. And what of Emma marrying Mr. Knightley in *Emma*? In feminist readings these denouements are patriarchal, complicitous—awful. The same complaints are repeated in volume after volume of criticism.

This repetition is one of the problems with feminist criticism: the "truths" about these works are established and then simply repeated. Feminist critics cite each other, but they seem not to read much work of other scholars, so that their criticism has become inbred. Even worse, many of the young scholars seem to read relatively little except for criticism: that is, their familiarity with texts, as opposed to criticism, is often quite thin. Similarly, historical context has

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little place in their readings. The result of these modes of critical response is the repetition of misreadings; with little depth of knowledge except for thorough acquaintance with "the criticism," it is difficult to fault a "reading" that has been seen in a series of critical works. And so Burney becomes a great author, and of course a feminist, and Austen becomes (here we have a choice between different feminist readings) either a feminist author *or* a woman who could not finish her books properly (all those Patriarchally Correct endings).

All of this is germane to the question you asked me about "power" issues between men and women. I think that the constant preoccupation with confrontation and suspicion between men and women that has lately been fostered in and by the academic community is not productive, is, in fact, unhealthy. Rather than being seen as issues between individuals that need to be dealt with by those individuals, all interactions take on cosmic proportions, becoming part of a dialectic that is often simply irrelevant to the issue at hand. I have seen too many female students in my office whose lives seemed to them very unhappy because they saw themselves as victims of constant sexist persecution. The situations they described to me, however, seemed products merely of run-of-the-mill human frictions on the job, at school, in personal relationships. Relieved of "sexist" overtones, the problems often seemed relatively trivial—their sufferers, relieved of the sense of victimization, much happier.

Your question to me, because you raised it in the context of that particular scholarly discussion, seems to imply some good commonsense doubts about the "issues" you have been told are so central to being a contemporary woman. I hope that you will bring those doubts to your scholarship; I hope even more that you will bring them to your relationships. Things in that last realm are complicated enough, after all.

MONA SCHEUERMANN *is the author of* Social Protest in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel *and, most recently,* Her Bread to Earn: Women, Money, and Society from Defoe to Austen. *She is Professor of English at Oakton Community College in Des Plaines, Illinois.*

Presbyterians Recovering

Richard J. Niebanck

American Presbyterians have a new service book. Intended to replace the 1970 *Worshipbook*, this new liturgical manual bears the more traditional name, *Book of Common Worship*. It is the outcome of a process begun in 1980 when the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. authorized the preparation of "a new book of services for corporate worship" that would be "an instrument for the renewal of the church at its life-giving center." The project was joined soon after by the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. In 1983 the UPCUSA and the "Southern" PCUS were reunited so that the project, and the resulting book, became the joint effort of two, not three, ecclesial bodies.

The new book's preface contains a forceful elaboration on the authorizing action:

> Because of the centrality of worship in the church's life, the continuing reform of worship is of primary importance in maintaining the integrity of the people of God. In an age dominated by individualism and secularism, it is particularly important to embrace forms of worship that are firmly rooted in the faith and foster a strong communal sense of being united with God and the community of faith in every time and place, and with a broken world in need of God's healing touch.

So understood, worship is seen as expressing the church's communion internally and its compassion "with a broken world" externally. In all this, the bottom line is identical with the headline: "[C]oncern for the reform of worship is . . . concern for the renewal of the church."

What is meant by "reform" and "renewal" becomes evident in even the most casual perusal of the *BCW*. Clearly, "reform" does not mean "change for the sake of social relevance," and "renewal" does not equal "novelty." From beginning to end the *BCW* bespeaks a commitment to reclaiming the classical tradition of Christian worship and presenting it in a way that is both faithful and accessible. It means to enable a thanksgiving that joins with the people of God of every time and place, including our own. Rather than reconstituting the great tradition into "digestible" terms, the *BCW* seeks to place our time and culture-specific worship within the context of that tradition.

The *BCW* is not meant to be a "denominational"

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book but a churchly one. It understands worship not only as *central to* but as *constitutive of* the church. "Constitutive" is understood in terms of both the church's organic life and its legal form. As the *BCW*'s preface points out, the "Directory of Worship," that peculiarly Presbyterian body of canons governing the public worship of God, is "a part of the constitution of the church and has the authority of church law. . . . It sets forth the standards and the norms for the ordering of worship." One is at once reminded that, of the churches of the Reformation, those of the Reformed tradition were perhaps the most serious about "law and order" in churchly governance, and that such ordered governance extends to the substance and conduct of public worship.

The preface contains a brief but instructive history of directories of worship and worship books, noting the tendencies of divergence and convergence between the two. The above-mentioned reunion of the "Northern" and "Southern" churches in 1983 occasioned the preparation of a new Directory of Worship. Coming as it did during the development of the *BCW*, the new Directory was able to influence the new liturgy in more ways than earlier directories had influenced worship books. Indeed, the influence was reciprocal, and so the *BCW* in its final form "is consistent with the provisions of the Directory."

American Presbyterianism was, the preface reminds us, historically influenced by English Separatism, with its characteristic suspicion of formal liturgies. It is this heritage that underlies the Directory of Worship and the worship book as separate entities. What distinguishes the *BCW* and the process that brought it into being is a deliberate effort to reestablish continuity with the continental Reformed church orders and their considerably more positive valuation of the formal liturgical agenda.

The *BCW* is truly an ecumenical—indeed a catholic—book, incorporating the fruit of the liturgical renaissance of the last 150 years, and especially the developments since Vatican II. The *BCW* celebrates the ecumenical convergence represented by such documents as Faith and Order's *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. It declares that "our true unity begins at the baptismal font" and that "unity at the font, pulpit, and table is the true road to healing the brokenness of Christ's church." The reinstitution of catholic worship the *BCW* understands to be both an indication of and an impetus toward greater unity among Christians.

The *BCW* is intended to order the worship of Almighty God by his covenant people gathered about Word and Sacrament. Yes, Word *and Sacrament*, for this church order, in both its rationale and its agenda, establishes the Eucharist as the principal service of the Lord's Day. This may come as a surprise to some non-Presbyterians who are accustomed to viewing the Reformed tradition through a Zwinglian lens. In fact, the *BCW* expresses a high Calvinism in which the so-called "Spiritual Presence" of Christ in the Eucharist is a *real* Presence, the Lord in his fullness, in personal communication, conveying and applying to the believer the full benefits of his saving work. The book is informed throughout by a sacramental understanding of the church and its worship life.

Besides the Eucharist, the *BCW* contains the full complement of offices one might expect in a church book in the "catholic" tradition. There is a treasury of prayers with which to enrich both public and private worship, prayers representing the widest spectrum of traditions, both ancient and contemporary. A three-year lectionary (from the Consultation on Common Texts) for Sundays and festivals is included, as is a two-year daily lectionary. Several pastoral offices are also included. All in all, this book of 1,107 pages is an invaluable resource to both laity and clergy of all Christian traditions.

Like every worship book, the *BCW* bears the marks of its time, the permanent evidence of the struggles—in both church and world—in the midst of which it was born. The most obvious of these, to this reader at least, is a meticulous avoidance of the use of the masculine pronoun in references to God and, in some instances, to the Son of God. This avoidance is signaled in the preface, where it is stated:

> Care was taken . . . that [the *BCW*'s] language be inclusive, not only with reference to the people of God, but also in language about God and address to God. Guidelines for inclusive language adopted by the General Assembly in 1975, 1979, 1980, and 1985 were implicitly followed.

It is arguable that the *BCW*'s "inclusive language" is discreet and unobtrusive, avoiding such atrocious locutions as "God's self" to replace the reflexive pronoun. It is also arguable that, as the *BCW* is introduced, controversy over the book's "catholicity" is far more likely than over its "inclusive" language. Finally, it is arguable that, as a book that is likely to be used for a few generations to come, the majority of its users will eventually not notice this linguistic change because they will not remember a time when God was "He."

Yet, at the risk of appearing impolite at best and insensitive at worst, this reader is constrained to register a certain unease. Does not so thorough a "linguistic cleansing" bespeak an animus inappropriate in the order of divine worship? And what are the credal implications of the avoidance of "he" (for instance at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer) in referring to the Risen and Ascended Christ? If the language of faith is "living tissue"—and, to this reviewer at least, it is—what are the risks involved in even the

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most careful of manipulations? These questions, and others like them, can only be raised here. Their answers will not soon become clear, if indeed they ever will in this world where finite words must be bearers of the infinite.

Even the greatest of liturgical orders is but an earthen vessel, soon to be superseded, corrected, improved upon. The *Book of Common Worship*, the fifth Presbyterian worship book in this century, is truly an exemplary work. Yet it remains one more earthen vessel. Like the rest of them, it points forward to that perfect, heavenly liturgy that shall have no end.

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A Satirist's Lament

Peter L. Berger

The August/September issue of FIRST THINGS contained a column of mine entitled "The Other Face of Gaia." It purported to be part of an address by one Aglaia Holt, Professor of Wymyn's Studies at California State University at Poco, and was intended to satirize the currently fashionable inanities of eco-feminism. I understand that the editorial offices of FIRST THINGS received calls and letters from a number of readers who took the piece at face value. Some were apparently upset that the journal should publish such radical stuff. One caller, though, was greatly taken by Professor Holt's views and wanted to obtain the full text of her address.

Many things could be said about this. I might consider it a compliment. Or the editors might commission another profile of the journal's readership. But I'm moved to a more disturbing question: Has this society reached the point of grotesquerie where satire is no longer possible? This is of course not a new question, but it demands to be considered again. Jonathan Swift, perhaps one of the most savage satirists in the English language, suggested in his "A Modest Proposal" that the problem of overpopulation in Ireland be solved by shipping off Irish babies to be eaten. What would Swift have done if he had learned, as he was sitting down to write his essay, that Parliament had just passed a law enacting this cannibalism?

Kweisi Mfume (who began life in Baltimore as Frizell Gray and was then nicknamed Pee-Wee) is chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus. (His adopted name, by the way, is supposed to mean "Conquering Son of Kings" in some African language.) For some time, Congressman Mfume has had two major items on his agenda: the first, now achieved, is an occupation of Haiti; the second is legislating a "racial justice provision" that would allow individuals sentenced to death to appeal on the basis of statistics showing racial imbalance in the imposition of capital punishment. Leave aside the issue of Haiti (it, too, strains the imagination of any would-be satirist). Focus instead on the death penalty legislation. As with other laws intended to secure "racial justice," the only way in which this one is likely to be applied is by means of quotas. I was trying to imagine a judge or a jury justifying a death sentence on, say, an Asian-American who under other circumstances would have received a lesser sentence—because the number of executed Asians was way under the statistically indicated allotment. My imagination failed me.

A federal court has recently decided that The Citadel, a South Carolina military academy that had long been a model for all the manly virtues of the Old South, must admit a woman (I've forgotten her name and am afraid to look it up as I might discover *her* nickname). At the time of writing, the court still has to decide three grave issues—whether the new cadet must be housed in the barracks, whether her uniform may or may not include a skirt, and whether her head is to be shaved in accordance with the institution's protocol for incoming students. I try to put myself into the mind of a federal judge as he ponders his decision on these matters. Again, I give up.

But let us get back to crime, the foremost national issue in the opinion of most Americans if the polls are to be believed. Legislators of both parties, liberals and conservatives in rare harmony, are engaged in passing laws of such severity as to remind one of the Black Codes of eighteenth-century England (a paradise of civic tranquility, as any historian will tell you). One of the most popular provisions of this enlightened legislation is the one known as "Three Strikes and You're Out"—anyone convicted of three violent felonies is to receive a life sentence with no parole. Set aside the small matter that our prisons, already filled to capacity (in large part as a result of the fabulously successful War Against Drugs), will be turned into geriatric wards for individuals who had decades earlier held up a couple of liquor stores and punched a policeman in the nose. It is also interesting to explore just what some of these felonies are. In Massachusetts, the great state in which I happen to live, there is, of course, a statute that defines as a felony an assault with a deadly weapon. It may come as a surprise that the "shod foot"—that is, a foot that has a shoe on it—is defined as such a "weapon." Boston, despite the ubiquity of the New Class in its public life, still contains some

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vigorous working-class neighborhoods where there are taverns with a healthy tradition of Saturday-night brawls. I'm trying to imagine Jimmy O'Malley, the amiable though volatile neighborhood tough, carefully taking off his shoes before he kicks that so-and-so cousin of his in the butt for the third time. . . . Ah, but our streets will be safe again!

I must give the future contents of this column some additional thought. Perhaps I will have to give it up. Or, alternatively, I should fill it with sociological analyses, or with dirges, or with elaborate maledictions. In the meantime, I'm off to Poco, California. I have a double date with Aglaia Holt and Chelsea Rabinowitz-Hakamoto. I will *not* tell the readers of First Things what the four of us (Chelsea is bringing a friend) intend to do.

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Bedtime in Hamilton, Mass.

If I push my head up
higher on the pillow I can look
through the empty
doorframe into my brother's
room where my father begins his
repertoire of two
Praise God From Whom All
All I see of him his pale
shirt-collar then the angle
of his back how it
echoes the ceiling's slope
but curves more
like the wing of a calico
butterfly blanket-stitched
to my quilt
Glory Be To The Father
Every stitch by hand they tell me
Not just the butterflies but
the pattern underneath I trace
in the semi-darkness
finding my way as if along
those curls of sound I breathe
as steady air
feeling what comes next the way
I sense the leaves
outside still falling
though I can't see them
falling like
a cascade of butterflies filling
the dark with a powdery
musky scent
Amen
the weight of
butterflies pressing
me down into sleep
while my father in raveling out
his final note
sustains the world

Jeanene Skillen

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Educating Father Abraham: The Meaning of Wife

Leon R. Kass

It is not exactly traditional to speak about the education of Abraham. Pious tales of the patriarch regard him as a precocious monotheist even before God calls him, a man who smashed his father's idols, a man who sprang forth fully pious and knowledgeable about the ways of God. But, in my view, a careful reading of the biblical text shows otherwise: Abraham indeed goes to school, God Himself is his major teacher, and Abraham's adventures constitute his education, right up to his final exam, the binding of Isaac.

To appreciate God's education of Abraham, it is necessary to grasp the pre-Abrahamic, which is to say the natural and uninstructed, human condition and to see just what needs educating and why. The necessary background is in fact presented in the opening eleven chapters of Genesis, and their proper study is indispensable for appreciating what follows.

The first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis (more precisely, chapters 2-11) present an account of human beginnings largely in temporal sequence, seemingly as an unfolding account of early human history. But this temporal account is, in my view, also and more importantly a vehicle for conveying something atemporal and permanent about human life in the world. The narrative teaches about human beginnings in two other senses: first, it presents a universal anthropology, showing the elements—the psychic and social beginnings—of human life as human, possibly true for all times and places. The people we meet in these stories—Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons—are prototypically, and not just ancestrally, human. Second, because the anthropological account has a moral-political intention, the stories introduce us to human life in all its moral ambiguity; we are meant to learn which human elements cause what sorts of moral or political trouble and why.

In this sense, the early chapters of Genesis begin the moral education of the reader. They picture mankind, living largely uninstructed, making a hash of one thing after another, from the loss of innocence in the Garden, to the fratricide of Cain, to the antediluvian violence of the generation of heroes, to the rebellion within the house of Noah, to the bold and impious project of the universal city, Babel. We learn especially about the dangers of human freedom and rationality, about the injustice that follows from excessive self-love and vanity, and about the evils born of human pride and the aspiration to full self-sufficiency. We see the troubles within the household: between man and woman, between brothers, between parents and children. We see the troubles in relation to outsiders, including both animals and other unrelated human beings. And we see the troubles in the relation between man and God.

By the time the careful reader has finished the first eleven chapters, he is well-nigh convinced that mankind, left to its own devices, is doomed to failure, destruction, and misery. He hopes that there is an alternative, that there might be a way of life different from the natural or uninstructed ways of men, a successful way in which mankind might flourish. According to the text, God more than shares both the reader's dismay and the reader's hopes. He decides to take a more direct role in the matter, beginning with Abraham. God Himself, as it were, will take Abraham by the hand, will serve as his tutor, and will educate him to be a new human being, one who will stand in right relation to his household, to other peoples, and to God—one who will set an example for countless generations, who, inspired by his story,

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will cleave to these righteous ways. Because of the moral education available to us through the first eleven chapters, when God calls Abraham we readers are also eager to listen.

I. Man and Woman: The Uninstructed Ways

The primordial relations of human life are the relations of the household, first among which is the relation of man and woman as husband and wife. The natural elements of this relation are revealed in the account of the primordial couple, living in the Garden of Eden. I here offer only the barest summary of human nature sexually considered, as it comes to light in this primal tale.*

First, beneath and prior to sexuality, there is the gender-neutral, needy, private, and self-loving animal interest in personal survival and well-being (represented by man in his solitary condition, before the creation of woman).

Next, we have the basic level of sexuality, founded in our sexual duality of male and female, experienced within as needy incompleteness, and issuing in an animal-like lust for bodily union. This aspect is expressed in the narcissistic and possessive speech of the man aroused by the first sight of the woman: "This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; and this shall be called woman (*ishah*) because from man (*ish*) this was taken." (2:23) This first expression of (especially male?) desire is felt as the love of one's own, more precisely, the love of one's own flesh. The first element of sexual love is literally self-ish: the other appears lovable because it is (regarded as) same, because it is (or seems to be) oneself. This love (not uniquely human) possessively seeks merging, *re*-union, fusion—as if to restore some "lost" bodily wholeness, as if the other is beloved because she is really just a missing part of oneself. I call this element "The Love of One's Own."

The second element of sexuality, this one peculiarly human, is tied to human self-consciousness, which is judgmentally aware, first of all, of the shame-filled meaning of sexual nakedness; it is represented in our text by the eye-opening discovery of the meaning of nakedness that is the first result of gaining the dangerous knowledge of good and bad: "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves girdles." (3:6-7) Proudly self-conscious human beings recognize with chagrin that sexuality means needy dependence on another, one who is truly other and not one's own, one who is not under our command; that sexuality means also enslavement to an ungovernable and disobedient appetite within, which embarrasses our claim to self-command and which wants of us more than we understand; that one's sexuality finally means one's perishability, for sexual activity is, willy-nilly, a vote in favor of our own demise, providing as it does for those who will replace us. This shame-filled sexual self-consciousness transforms the relation between man and woman, both of whom are now eager for approbation and afraid of rejection. Each seeks approval, praise, respect, and esteem—not just sexual gratification. The ugly is covered over (the fig leaf), the body is adorned and beautified, lust is transformed into eros, and the lovers—recognizing their true otherness—seek to transcend their apartness through mutual pursuit of beauty and nobility. I call this element "The Love of the Beautiful."

The third element of sexuality is generativity. Beyond lust for union with "one's own flesh," beyond romance in the service of admiring and being admired, the meaning of man and woman has much to do with children, both their generation and their rearing. This goes along with painful childbirth for the woman, domestication of the man, division of labor and its attendant dangers of conflict, inequality, and rule, and yet also the creative, regenerative, and redemptive possibility of renewal through children. Through children, man and woman may finally achieve some genuine unification (beyond the mere sexual "union" which fails to do so): the two become as one through sharing generous love for this third being, seen as good. In the face of the harsh reality of human life, generativity—especially the woman's power to bear—holds out hope for transcendence of privacy, duality, and perishability. This simultaneously divisive and unifying aspect of sexuality appears in our text with God's grim forecast of the human future, vexingly different for woman and man, which contains only one glimmer of hope, a hope that is immediately seized upon by the man when he renames the woman "Eve," "because she was the mother of all living." The man here sees the woman in a new light, as a generous, generating, and creative force, with powers he can only look up to in awe and gratitude—or perhaps, rather, with envy and resentment because he has no share in it. I call this aspect of human sexuality "Generative or Generous Love."

These natural elements of human sexuality—Love of One's Own, Love of the Beautiful, Generative Love—with their frankly discordant tendencies, coexist warily side by side in the uninstructed relation between man and woman. Self-love and love of one's own are at odds with the love of the other, whether simply as other or as beautiful; both are at odds with the self-sacrificing (even if creative and generous) love of a child, seen as one's replacement; self-preservation and self-assertion are at odds with reproduction. Besides, each partner (as male or female) has nonidentical interests and desires, whose differences both incite union and threaten divorce.

Furthermore, none of the elements of human sexu-

* For a more thorough discussion of this subject and this story, see my "Man and Woman: An Old Story," First Things, November 1991.

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ality is unambiguously good: possessive male lust for union can be degrading to the woman, making her but an object of his satisfaction (as we shall soon see in the story of Pharaoh and Sarah); the pride-filled love of beauty and the concern for self-esteem (what Rousseau calls "amour-propre") give rise to jealousy, discord, and bloodshed (as we see in the rapacious conduct of the sons of God toward the beautiful daughters of man [6:2], which, like the rape of Helen, heralds the chaotic battles of the heroes, leading God to flood the earth and start again with Noah); and womanly pride in her generative capacity can give rise to domestic strife, injustice, and impiety (as we see in Eve's boastful celebration of the birth of Cain, who, bearing his mother's pride, kills his brother out of wounded pride and jealousy). Man and woman, left to their own devices, are bound for trouble.

Taming the dangerous female pride in her generative powers, which led Eve to boast that "I have gotten a man [equally] with God," is relatively easy: institute a prolonged period of barrenness before allowing childbirth, so that the woman (and her husband) will understand that a child is not the woman's creation and possession, but an unmerited gift. But taming male possessive lust or the deformations incident on the man's love of womanly beauty is more difficult, as is inducing him to stand rightly with respect to his wife as the prospective mother of his children—all the more so if he is personally ambitious for fame and glory. It is this aspect of the education of Abraham that we now intend to follow.

II. Who Is Abraham?

To know Abraham, we must begin with his father, Terah, a member of the ninth generation after Noah, a descendant of Shem, Noah's most pious son. Terah is himself quite late to fatherhood; whereas his progenitors in the preceding seven generations begot their first-born son no older than 35 (35, 30, 34, 30, 32, 30, 29), Terah is a grandfatherly seventy years old when Abram, the first of his three sons, is born. He witnesses the death of his youngest son, Haran, father of Lot, and sometime afterwards leaves his homeland, Ur of the Chaldees (otherwise known as Babylonia), and heads for Canaan, taking with him his son Abram, his grandson Lot, and Sarai the wife of his son Abram.

Why Terah leaves we are not told; but even before Abram is called to Canaan, his father was, quite on his own, drawn toward what would become the promised land—away from the Tigris-Euphrates valley, away from the land famous for the worship of heaven, the land where man first learned to measure the motions of the heavenly bodies (astronomy) in the hope of learning how to predict and control terrestrial events (through astrology). But though he was something of a radical—perhaps even sensing that there was something wrong with heaven worship—Terah did not complete his journey, but settled in Haran, a city, we learn from non-biblical sources, that was, like Ur, a center of moon worship.

Abram, Terah's first-born, given a proud name that perhaps means "lofty or exalted father" or "the father is exalted," seems not to be bothered by the advanced age of his father. On the contrary, Abram goes with Terah on his wanderings toward Canaan, whereas his brother Nahor stays behind: Abram shows filial duty and/or shares his father's reason to leave. When he goes, he goes a married man:

> And took Abram and Nahor to themselves wives, and the name of Abram's wife was Sarai ("princess") and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah ("queen"), the daughter of Haran. . . . And Sarai was barren; she had no child. (11: 29-30)

The wives were "taken" by the brothers, but whereas we are told that Nahor took his orphaned niece, we are not given the parentage of Sarai. Instead of hearing of her origins, we learn here only that she is childless; soon, we shall learn that she is also very beautiful.

So who is Abram? He is a childless, rootless, homeland-less, perhaps godless, devoted son of an old wanderer and radical, one who has grown out of, but who may have outgrown, the Babylonian ways and gods. He is very far from the self-satisfied and secure condition of the builders of Babel whose story immediately precedes his own. We surmise that he longs for roots, land, home, settled ways, children, and something great, perhaps even for the divine. About the divine, we wonder whether he might even have intuited a thing or two as a result of his experience in Ur: on his own or perhaps following his father, he may have seen through the worship of heaven. He may have figured out that there must be a single, invisible, and intelligent source behind the many silent and dumb heavenly bodies, that the truth is not one city with many gods, but many cities in search of the one God. Closer to home, Abram stays long married to a childless (but beautiful) woman; he is still with her at age seventy-five when God first calls him. Hillel Fradkin argues from this fact that Abram's childlessness is not altogether involuntary: he abstains from sowing seed with another wife because of his faithful love of Sarai, a love perhaps connected with her great beauty. In this erotic love Fradkin sees the basis of Abram's educability, for eros generally directs the soul to something higher than oneself. We shall see to what extent this turns out to be so in Abram's case, and whether Sarai's beauty is the womanly asset of greatest importance from God's point of view.

Of Abram's initial character we know little, beyond these frankly speculative suggestions. The first real

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clue to what really moves his soul comes only when he responds to God's call. God tells him to go forth, away from his land, his kinsmen, and his father's house, to a land God will show him. With this demanding command comes a seven-fold promise:

> "And I will make of thee a great nation,
> and I will bless thee,
> and I will make thy name great,
> and you shall be a blessing.
> And I will bless those [plural] that bless you,
> and harm him [singular] that curses you,
> and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you." (12:2-3)

Personally, Abram is promised that he will be the founder of a great (i.e., numerous and/or mighty and/or important) nation and that he will be prosperous, famous, and a standard by which a blessing is invoked. Those who wish him well will prosper, he who mistreats him will suffer, and all the world's peoples shall flourish on his account. God appeals directly to Abram's situation and to Abram's longings and ambitions—the love of fame and glory, the love of gain, the aspiration to be a founder of a great nation.

God knew His customer: Abram, obeying the command, goes immediately, without hesitating and without so much as a tiny question. In apparent obedience, he continues the journey his father had begun on his own. Yet the text implies that Abram goes, leaving his father's house and the life he knows, not, as the strictly pious interpretation would have it, because he is already a God-fearing and obedient man of faith who knows that the voice is the voice of God Almighty. He goes because, in his heart, he is an ambitious man with a desire for greatness who wants the promise, and he goes because, in his mind, he has some reason to believe that the voice that called him just might belong to a power great enough to deliver. For what kind of being is it that speaks but is not seen, and, more wondrous and more to the point, can see into my invisible soul, to know precisely what it is that I, Abram, most crave? Let's take a walk with this voice and see what it can do.

You and I would probably ignore a voice that spoke to us in these terms. But not Abram. It is less that he has nothing to lose; in fact, he loses a great deal: his remaining attachments to land and family. It is rather that, as a great-hearted man, with large, even political, aspirations, he has much to gain. True, next to the statesmanly Moses, Abram will appear to be rather mild and contemplative; Moses the liberator and lawgiver is from the start more obviously political. But seen in his own terms, Abram is no less a political man; we have it, albeit indirectly, on God's own authority: just look at how God chooses to catch this man. (Later, we will learn too of Abram's remarkable military prowess, as he drives back the invading forces in the war of the kings.)

Many a man has a desire to found and to rule, many a man longs for a great name—especially one that could outlast his own extinction in death. These problematic aspirations, whose dangers have been alluded to in earlier stories in Genesis, God will exploit and then educate in the founding of His new way. Central to this education is an education about the indispensable role of women in the success of any great nation, even more, in any nation whose greatness is to be grounded in justice and whose institutions are to aspire to holiness.

How does a nation become great? It must, first of all, be able to preserve itself, to survive in a world threatened by its enemies and by those who would profit from its downfall. Accordingly, it requires leadership and manly prowess, to rule the unruly and to inspire the timid, at the very least in order to safeguard what is their own, perhaps even to expand and extend their influence and dominion. But virtuous leaders, indispensable especially for founding, cannot secure a nation's greatness alone; nor can they alone preserve their own great name. Their own mortality—which is in large part a spur to their ambition—necessitates a concern for perpetuation, for progeny, for the next generation. However manly the man, founding a great nation is absolutely dependent on woman, on her generative power. She holds the key to the future, not only by her natural capacity to give birth but by her moral and educative influence over her children, an influence itself rooted in the powerful mother-child bond imposed by natural necessity. This educative influence is all the more important because natural manly excellence cannot be counted on in each generation: the sons of the founder rarely have the father's virtue, yet they must be reared well enough to replace him and perpetuate his successes and his ways. Rearing becomes still more important—indeed, supremely important—if the ways of the fathers are to be not the typical ways of mankind uninstructed, but the ways of a people devoted to righteousness and holiness. For all these reasons, founding and sustaining a great and godly nation is absolutely dependent on women, and not just any women, but the right women: women who are able to attach their husbands to the high-minded and reverent rearing of the next generation.*

It should not surprise us that Abram, to begin with, does not understand this truth. Rarely do great men, with great dreams, like to acknowledge their dependence, least of all on the seemingly "weaker" sex. Before he can become a founder, and even a proper father, he must become a proper husband and appreciate Sarai as a wife.

* The best biblical example of such virtuous womanhood is Rebekah, the wife Abraham (or rather his servant) found for Isaac, his son. See my "A Woman for All Seasons," *Commentary*, September 1991.

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In the course of educating him for the work of founding, God will exploit Abram's childlessness to move him forward, holding the prospect of his own offspring before him as a carrot. In part to teach Sarah and Abraham that children are a gift, not a human achievement, God delays the birth of Isaac. But the delay is also indispensable for educating Abram regarding the importance of woman and, in particular, the meaning of wife. That he badly needs such education we learn in the episode that follows almost immediately after he responds to God's call.

III. Abram in Egypt: Wife-Sister Story #1

Abram answers the call and goes as commanded. But he does not go alone, for "Lot went with him, and Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed out of Haran." Perhaps out of responsibility for his dead brother's son, perhaps because he still clings to his family of origin, but perhaps because he regards Lot as tacit heir-apparent, Abram takes Lot along on his divinely appointed mission. Whether Abram intends this or not, Lot, an as-it-were adopted son, represents perpetuation insurance, just in case God cannot provide him any other offspring. When he and his little band arrive in Canaan, "the Canaanite was then in the land." In response both to Abram's obedience in hearkening and to his likely perplexity in finding the land occupied, God appears to Abram, promising that he will (in the future) assign this land to Abram's seed (by silent implication, not to him). Abram, presumably in gratitude and awe, builds an altar.

But the promised land proves even more unpromising, owing to famine. Abram goes, uninstructed, to Egypt, the fertile place, to gain food, that is, to secure his own preservation. In this place, Abram has his first real encounter with another nation. He acquires the experience of being a stranger in a strange land and encounters the decadent and unjust ways of *the* civilized alternative to what will be God's new way. He learns what it is like to be treated unjustly because one is a stranger: he suffers first-hand the tension between the love of your own (self-love) and justice. But he acquiesces in this opposition by repeating it, in his dealings with his own wife.

> And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife: "Behold please, I know thou art a woman beautiful to look upon. And it will come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they will say: 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but let you live. Say, I pray thee, that you are my sister, that it may go well with me for thy sake and that my soul may live because of you." (12:11-13)

Fearing for his life, Abram asks Sarai to deny their marriage and to pose as his sister, fully expecting that the Egyptians will be attracted by her beauty and interested in having her. Events will show that his fears were well-founded, if anything, even underestimated: he hadn't reckoned that it would be Pharaoh himself who would take her, sight unseen, on the recommendation of his henchmen who are apparently always on the prowl for their master, rounding up beautiful women for his harem. Abram has a genuine dilemma, with which one must sympathize: either he can try to save his own life at the expense of his wife's honor, or he can risk his likely death, after which his wife will also be taken (only this time as a widow). Thinking about God's promise, Abram reasons that it depends on his own survival even more than it depends on Sarai's fidelity and marital chastity; and, should he have considered the matter, he probably concluded that there was no risk of confounding his lineage through adulterous union, for Sarai was barren. Abram in his heart willingly commits Sarai to adultery.

Some might say that Abram should have trusted in God to protect him, but they read with hindsight; Abram would have had no reason to rely on God. God had not sent him to Egypt, God did not promise to protect him. And, for all Abram knew, God might have no power in Egypt, which had its own gods, among them apparently Pharaoh himself. Under these circumstances, Abram's conduct could be justified not only as a matter of prudence in the face of necessity; if the divine promise is to be fulfilled, Abram might even have an (inferred) duty to keep himself alive, at all costs. This is not only his opinion: Sarai, his wife, accedes to his request, willingly dishonoring herself for his sake.

The deception succeeds: Not only is Abram's life spared; Pharaoh does well by Abram for her sake. In exchange for his "sister," he acquires sheep, oxen, he-asses, menservants, maidservants, she-asses, and camels.

But Abram's choice is at best unsavory, at worst criminal and unholy; and his own conduct aside, the fate of Sarai is offensive to the Lord, who "plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues *because of Sarai Abram's wife.*" (12:17; emphasis added) For Pharaoh she was a nameless beauty, for Abram she could be passed off as his sister, but for God she was *Sarai*, Abram's wife. God intervenes to end this adulterous liaison because He cares for Sarai but for Sarai especially as Abram's *wife*. God is concerned to defend the dignity of woman as wife. What this means, we—along with Abram—must gradually learn, for we—and he—are not here given any reasons, at least not by God.

After putting plague and plague together and coming up with adultery, Pharaoh—not God—rebukes Abram for his deception:

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> "What is this that thou hast done unto me? Why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now therefore behold thy wife, take her and go!" (12:18-19)

Pharaoh blames Abram, with justification, for Abram had lied, though he might also have faulted his own predatory behavior; and though Pharaoh tacitly offers the principle—no adultery—he does so only out of his current afflictions. We cannot be sure that, absent the plagues, he would have regretted the adultery, or that he would not have killed for the woman as Abram had feared.

Abram makes no response to Pharaoh's complaint, but one should not conclude that he has learned his lesson. The reader has been told, but Abram was not, that God is behind Pharaoh's change of heart and Sarai's deliverance. True, Abram might harbor suspicions along these lines; he sees that there are limits to Pharaoh's power, that this demi-god and ruler of *the* supreme human society must yield. But it is doubtful that Abram now knows that he himself must honor his wife. On the contrary, he leaves Egypt a wealthy man (12:16, 13:2); it has indeed "gone well with him on account of Sarai." It may even seem to him that his newly acquired wealth constitutes the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promised prosperity. (A truly nasty reader may even suspect that Abram has discovered the profit available in running "the oldest profession.")

The attentive reader may learn from this story that though one may choose a wife, one cannot choose what "wife" means, that a wife is not transmutable into a sister or a concubine when it serves one's purposes. But Abram is very likely quite impressed by his success in Egypt, even more than by any suspicion that the founder of a great nation must not be indifferent to who becomes the mother of his children (or who fathers the children born to his wife). Abram is not yet ready to become a father or a founder of God's new way.

Yet there is perhaps one small sign of movement on Abram's part. When Abram had left Haran, he "took Sarai, his wife, Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran." (12:5) But when he goes up out of Egypt, he goes first "with his wife, and all that he had," and (last) "together with Lot." (13:1) There seems to be a greater closeness to his wife and a beginning of distancing from Lot as possible heir, a distancing that is completed in the next story, when, thanks in part to the great wealth first accumulated in Egypt, Abram parts with Lot to avoid fratricidal conflict. (Lot, choosing first, takes the well-watered plain of the Jordan, which looked to him "like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt." [13:10]) When this happens, Abram is left without even an adopted son.

IV. Hagar, the Egyptian: The Wife Surrogate

In his next adventure, Abram enters the war of the kings in order to rescue his nephew, Lot, who had been captured by the invading Babylonians when they conquered Sodom. Though he is not interested in extending his power or ruling his neighbors, Abram acquires and exercises the political-military power that great nationhood entails. He vanquishes his foes, rescues his kin (unlike Cain, Abram *is* his brother's keeper), negotiates his own national independence, spurns the seductive gifts of his Canaanite beneficiaries, and establishes diplomatic relations with his neighbors, acting shrewdly, bravely, and justly. But all is not well. The encounter with death in battle has produced a change in Abram. When God appears to him in a vision after his victory and promises him a great reward, Abram, fearful, complains (for the first time) of his childlessness:

> "O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I shall die [literally, "I shall go"] childless, and the one in charge of my house is Eliezer of Damascus. . . . Behold, to me Thou has given no seed, and, lo, my steward will be my heir." (15:2-3)

God responds by saying that not the steward but "he that shall spring from your own loins shall be your heir." (15:4) Encouraged by these remarks, Abram no doubt has this prophecy in mind when opportunity knocks, in a novel proposal tendered by Sarai, who is still, now ten years later (at age seventy-five), unable to conceive.

> Now Sarai *Abram's wife* bore him no children; and she had a handmaid, *an Egyptian*, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram: "Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: go in, I pray thee, unto my handmaid; perhaps I shall be builded up [or "I shall have a son"] through her." And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai *Abram's wife* took *Hagar the Egyptian*, her handmaid, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Abram *her husband* to be his wife [or "concubine"]. And he went in unto Hagar and she conceived. (16:2-4; emphasis added)

Sarai, frustrated by her inability to bear Abram an heir, offers Abram a concubine surrogate, following a custom well-documented in the ancient Near East. In a gesture seemingly self-effacing, she hopes instead to be builded up in his esteem and in her power. And Abram, not the last man to believe that God helps those who help themselves, readily accepts the offer: here is a chance for the promised son out of his own loins. But the narrator, in telling of this exchange, hints loudly at the difficulties. Sarai is twice

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said to be Abram's wife and he her husband: how then can Hagar be his wife? And how can any resulting child be truly Sarai's? How will the handmaid view her mistress—and her husband—should she bear the master's child? We are forewarned: should Hagar became pregnant, the lineage will be confounded and marital harmony challenged. And there is more: Abram's child will have an Egyptian mother—just as Sarai in Pharaoh's house might have born a son to an Egyptian father.

Whether she knows it or not, Sarai is measure-for-measure repaying Abram for the near-adulterous liaison in Egypt. Just as Abram had pushed Sarai into adultery with Pharaoh, so Sarai pushes Abram into quasi-adultery with Hagar, this time casting herself, as it were, into the role of sister. Just as Abram had been moved by fear and the desire for gain, so Sarai is moved by shame and the desire for advancement: neither of them shows any regard for their *joint* future as husband and wife. Lest there be any doubt about the connection of the two episodes, Hagar is clearly identified as "Hagar the Egyptian," a legacy and part of the "wealth" gained in the wife-sister misrepresentation with Pharaoh. Desirous of seed, Abram is induced to imitate Pharaoh in beginning a harem; he accepts a quasi-adulterous threat to his marriage—whereas, in Egypt, he had proposed it—for the sake of progeny. (We note, in passing, that the Bible's first two episodes of adultery or near-adultery arise not from lust but from calculation. That they are nonetheless problematic shows that the law restraining adultery has more to do with protecting lineage and transmission than with preventing alienation of marital affections.)

The result is as we feared: the surrogacy stratagem backfires. Hagar conceives and, as a result, shows contempt for Sarai. Sarai, who had hoped to be builded up, is in fact lowered down. She petulantly blames her husband for this state of affairs and quarrels with him; to keep peace, he defers to her, telling her to do with the maid as she pleases (proving, by the way, that he cares not for Hagar herself; she was to him but a seed bed): at least at this point, Abram chooses his wife over the mother of his child-to-be. Sarai, in an inversion of the later Egyptian oppression of the Israelites, deals harshly with Hagar, but God intervenes to comfort Hagar and informs her that she will bear a son whose name shall be Ishmael ("God heareth") who "shall be a wild ass of a man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the face of all his brethren." (16:12) Ishmael is described as the utterly natural child that he is, conceived without regard to the permanence of marriage or to the difference between the ways of Egypt and the ways of God. Three times in the last two verses of the story (16:15-16) does the narrator rub our nose in the fact that it was Hagar, not Sarai, who bore a son, Ishmael, to Abram (when the latter was eighty-six years old).

The possibly innocent attempt to pinch-hit for the wife is, in result, anything but innocent. Not only is there still potential trouble in the household; worse, Abram will later be compelled to banish his first-born son, and the descendants of Ishmael will later make trouble for the descendants of Isaac—as they do until the present day. But for the time being, thanks to their error, both Abram and Sarai stand a bit closer to discovering the meaning of wife: Abram, that a wife is more than a seed-bed; Sarai, conversely, that bearing the child oneself is important; both of them, that joint rearing even more than bearing may be the true work of husband and wife. But before they can really be ready for the work of rearing, they will need even more to discover that the fulfillment of their relation as husband and wife depends finally on providence; they must remain open to procreation *within the marriage*, against all odds, trusting in higher than human powers to deliver the wished-for gift of life.

V. Abraham in Gerar: Wife-Sister Story #2

In the interests of space, I touch but lightly on some intervening episodes relevant to Abraham's education regarding the meaning of wife, including the covenant involving circumcision, during which both Abram (age ninety-nine) and Sarai (age eighty-nine) are renamed by God as Abraham ("father of multitudes") and Sarah (still "princess") and during which God tells a disbelieving Abraham that He will give him a son by Sarah, that He will bless her, and that she will be a mother of nations, with kings of peoples springing from her. Abraham, incredulous, prefers the son in the flesh to the one in the mind. He says to God, "O that Ishmael might live before thee." (17:18) But God, rebuking him, insists on the importance of the right son, by the right mother, which is to say by his wife: "Nay, but Sarah *thy wife* shall bear thee a son . . . and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him." (17:19; emphasis added) There is also the episode with the three strangers to whom Abraham offers superb hospitality, the excellence of which partly depends on the fact that Sarah is present to help out; this well-ordered household is sharply contrasted with that of Lot, living in Sodom, to whom the same strangers come. Here, Mrs. Lot, a native Sodomite, is out of the picture, and, in a parody of hospitality, the poorly wived Lot is compelled to offer his own daughters to a rapacious mob in order to try to save his guests from homosexual rape. (The same daughters will later commit incest upon their father.) And I also skip over the lovely scene in which the strangers announce directly to Sarah herself that she will bear a son within the year, and how God in repeating her response to Abraham ("After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, *my lord being so old?*") tactfully alters it to omit any reference to his, Abraham's, advanced

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age ("Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, *I who am old*?'" [18:13]). I move instead to the second wife-sister story, all the more remarkable because it is the sequel to this now-precise promise of a son to Sarah within the year.

Traveling in the land of Gerar, Abraham (although the narrator here again insists that she is his wife) announces to the nations that Sarah is his sister (20:2), and Abimelech ("father of the king"), king of Gerar, sends for Sarah and takes her for his harem. (Those who refuse to believe that an eighty-nine-year-old woman could attract a king's desire have not properly imagined how extraordinarily beautiful Sarah really was, perhaps all the more so now that she is rejuvenated as a result of the news of her imminent motherhood. The less erotic may prefer, as an alternative, that the king may have sought through this union an alliance with Abraham for reasons of political or economic gain.) Given the announcement of Sarah's impending pregnancy, Abraham's conduct here is hard to fathom: perhaps, as he will later say when the lie is exposed, he still fears for his life; but he might also be imitating a practice that proved so profitable to him in Egypt. Whatever his motive, he displays a certain recklessness with the promise of Sarah's restored fertility. Could it be that he was still banking on the ascendancy of Ishmael, his first-born? Could Abraham have doubted God's word about Sarah?

Abimelech is a different man from Pharaoh, so God treats him not with plagues but with a prophetic dream, informing him that the woman is another man's wife. Abimelech, who had not come near Sarah, protests his innocence and his concern for his people:

> "Lord, wilt Thou slay even a righteous nation? Said he not himself unto me: 'She is my sister'? and she, even she herself said: 'He is my brother.' In the simplicity of my heart and the innocency of my hands have I done this." (20:4-5)

God accepts Abimelech's defense, adding that it was He who kept Abimelech from touching Sarah, to "withhold thee from *sinning against Me*" (20:6); but He insists that the man's wife be restored under penalty of death. Afraid for his life, but armed with the knowledge that a powerful god stands opposed to (this) adultery, Abimelech confronts Abraham, as it were serving as God's own messenger and witness:

> "What hast thou done unto us? [cf. 12:18] and wherein have I sinned against thee, that thou hast brought on me *and on my kingdom a great sin*? Thou hast done unto me *deeds that ought not be done*." (20:9; emphasis added)

Abimelech insists to Abraham that adultery is a great sin, a sin that stains an entire people, a deed that ought not to be done; and he begs for an explanation of how Abraham could have promoted such a heinous deed.

Abraham, who had said nothing on the previous occasion to the explosive Pharaoh, here responds with a two-fold defense. First, he was afraid of how he as a stranger would be treated:

> "Because I thought: Surely the fear [or "awe"] of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake." (20:11)

Abraham's concern is not far-fetched. The love of your own and the mistrust (even hatred) of the stranger is the natural human way. Only when human beings come to realize that the stranger shares in a common humanity, all equally in the image of God—and, in this sense at least, that the stranger may in fact be a god in disguise—will strangers be treated justly (i.e., with the "fear-awe of God").

But it is Abram's second reason that comes as a complete surprise, at least to the reader:

> "And moreover she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife." (20:12)

Sarah was first of all his (half) sister, only later did she become his wife. As a defense, this speech is obviously defective. Even if Sarah is his (half) sister, Abraham's announcement of that truth in fact amounts to a lie: he suppresses the only relevant fact, namely, that she is (also) his wife. Readers of the text who know that marrying your sister or half-sister is later forbidden (see, e.g., Leviticus 18:9 and 20:17) may assume, wrongly, that sister and wife are here mutually exclusive categories, and that Abraham had explicitly denied that Sarah was his wife when he announced that she was his sister. But, as we shall soon see, that is not the case, for Abimelech finds perfectly acceptable the fact that Sarah is both sister and wife. Abraham's lie consists not in what he said but in what he did not say: he stated only half the truth and concealed the crucial other half.

Abraham concludes his apologia before Abimelech:

> "And it came to pass when God [or "the gods"] caused [the verb is plural!] me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her: 'This is the kindness which thou shalt show unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me: He is my brother.'" (20:13)

Abimelech, unimpressed with this defense, does not answer Abraham's speech with words but with gifts (sheep, oxen, menservants, and maidservants), "re-

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stores him *Sarah his wife*" (20:14), and graciously allows him to dwell in the land where he pleases. His choice speech he reserves for Sarah:

> "Behold, I have given *thy brother* a thousand pieces of silver; behold, it is for thee a covering of the eyes to all that are with thee; and before all men thou art righted." (20:16; emphasis added)

Abimelech, a virtuous and magnanimous man, understands that Sarah has been shamed and compromised, even if with her consent. The gift of a thousand pieces of silver is intended to clear her name of all wrongdoing and impurity: to restore her reputation as a chaste and faithful wife ("the covering of her eyes," a proof of modesty) and to close the eyes of others to what had taken place so as to spare her humiliation, in short, to vindicate her completely. In the noblest touch of all, in speaking with her Abimelech still plays along with the designation of Abraham as her brother; he spares her the shame that would come from her learning that he knew her true status.

Abraham, astonished by Abimelech's delicate and noble response and by his obvious regard for Sarah *as Abraham's wife*, prays to God—for the first and only time in Genesis. What he prayed for we do not know, but the act itself indicates Abraham's returning to God and a tacit admission of having sinned. God responds by healing Abimelech, his wife, and his maidservants, who now all bear children, "for the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of *Sarah, wife of Abraham.*" (20:18; emphasis added)

This time around, thanks to the virtuous Abimelech who bears moral witness against Abraham and who displays a clear appreciation of the honor due to Sarah as a wife, Abraham is forced to confront the sinfulness of his own conduct. Very likely he sees what the reader is told, in so many words: that God insists on the dignity and honor of the woman as wife; and that the blessings of fertility and progeny—the promised great nation of innumerable descendants—depend upon man's proper regard for the meaning of wife.

The time is now ripe for the long-promised birth of Abraham's true heir, to Sarah, which happens in the immediate sequel:

> The Lord *took note of [or "remembered" or "visited"] Sarah* as He had said, and the Lord *did for Sarah* as He had spoken. And *Sarah conceived and bore* to Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him *whom Sarah bore to him*, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. (21:1-4; emphasis added)

Twenty-five years after he received God's call, the first concrete evidence of the veracity of God's promise is finally provided: the right son and heir, whose rightfulness as heir consists entirely in the fact that he is born to Abraham's wife.

The complete reordering of the household now requires only the banishment of Hagar the Egyptian and her son Ishmael, a deed grievously painful to Abraham "because of his son," but insisted on by Sarah (who had seen Ishmael "making sport"—the meaning is uncertain). God intervenes on Sarah's side, though with due regard also for Ishmael:

> And God said unto Abraham: "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; *in all that Sarah saith unto thee, hearken unto her voice*; for in Isaac shall seed be called to thee. And also of the son of thy bondwoman will I make a nation because he is thy seed." (21:12-13; emphasis added)

Abraham, hearkening now to the joint voice of both God and Sarah, acquiesces and banishes Ishmael and Hagar; he must trust that God will look after the lad. But Ishmael, hearkening to his own mother, becomes lost to God's new way. In the last we hear of Ishmael (until he and Isaac together come to bury Abraham), his mother takes for him a *wife out of the land of Egypt*. In this allegedly patriarchal text, the maternal influence is hardly slighted.

VI. Wife or Sister? The Meaning of Wife

It is time to pull together some threads and to venture some generalizations about what Abraham—and what we—have learned on the subject of wife. Three times we have Abraham and Sarah involved in adventures that confound the meaning of wife—twice with sister, once with the Egyptian handmaiden or concubine. That Sarah is in fact Abraham's half-sister as well as his wife is the clue to the deeper meaning of these adventures. So long as he is willing to treat her as a sister—which he does several times to avoid the consequences of her great beauty—Sarah remains barren. Only when he is prepared to look upon her simply as a wife does she in fact become one in the full and proper sense.

When Abraham and Sarah went to Egypt to escape the famine, Abraham asked Sarah to say that she was his sister so that "my soul may live because of you." If Sarah appears as his wife, Abraham's life will be in danger. The perceived threat is both literal and figurative: literal, in that the Egyptians may indeed kill him, in order to gain the beautiful Sarah; figurative, in that admitting to having a wife is tantamount to accepting the fact of one's own mortality and one's dependence on woman's generative and nurturing powers. For as we learn along with Abraham, woman *as wife* means not "one's own missing flesh,"

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nor even a beloved because beautiful adornment to one's self-esteem, but one's chosen and committed equal partner in generation and transmission, in providing for one's own replacement, by making a home that will rear well the next generation. Abraham at the beginning acts as if the promise of becoming a great nation can be realized by himself acting alone; thus preoccupied with his own survival, he doubly "sacrifices" his wife—first by denying her wifeliness and then by abandoning her to Pharaoh's harem—symbolically enacting his belief in his own self-sufficiency.

Years later, now preoccupied with his wish for an heir, Abraham accepts his need for woman but not yet his need for a wife. He sheds his wife again (albeit on her suggestion), this time to use the Egyptian handmaid as a surrogate womb. It is not enough to say that this was then a customary practice in the ancient Near East; such a practice has an inner meaning that God's new way rejects. For a woman is not merely a seed-bed or even, to speak less luridly, just the creative "mother of all living" (as Adam had put it, thinking only of Eve's *natural* power of generation). For these purely natural deeds, any woman will do. But because *human* procreation means rearing as well as bearing, the naturally loose relations of male and female must be transformed and fixed by the legal or conventional *singular* relation of husband and wife—that is, by marriage.

Woman as wife is a long-term partner in rearing, in transmitting the way of life that is the spiritual lifeblood of the family and the nation. As the story makes plain, it will not do, from the point of view of rearing and transmission, to sow one's seed in culturally foreign soil, to have as the mother of one's children a woman who follows other gods (or none at all). And one certainly cannot found or perpetuate God's new way by "Egyptianizing" one's descendants or, worse, by adopting Pharaoh's own tyrannical practices, including those with respect to women.

But if the work of rearing the next generation is best conducted with a spouse who shares one's customs, ways, and gods, why would not sister and brother be the marital ideal? For both share not only common origin and common blood, but, more important, common rearing and common mores. We who have lived so long with the taboo against brother-sister incest—a taboo we owe, by the way, to biblical religion and the new way begun with Abraham—take for granted that wife and sister are mutually exclusive categories, so much so that we cannot remember the reasons why this should be so—except perhaps for latter-day scientific arguments about the genetic dangers of inbreeding. We also have forgotten—or are too well brought up to consider—that brother-sister unions may in fact be the more natural and uninstructed way of the human race, as it is among our primate cousins.

Rousseau, a man not shy about such matters, paints a vivid picture of human generation in the earliest times:

> No, there were families, but there were no Nations; there were domestic languages, but there were no popular languages; there were marriages, but there was no love. Each family was self-sufficient and propagated itself from its own stock alone: children of the same parents grew up together and gradually found ways to make themselves intelligible to one another; the distinction between the sexes appeared with age, natural inclinations sufficed to unite them, instinct served in lieu of passion, habit in lieu of predilection, people became man and wife without having ceased to be brother and sister. (*Essay on the Origin of Languages*)

Rousseau's account is in fact quite compatible with the anthropology of the early chapters of Genesis, which preserves delicate silence about, say, the wife of Cain, and which finally reveals that Abraham took to wife his own (half) sister. Rousseau, in a note appended to the just-quoted passage, adds this powerful moral (albeit utterly secular) commentary:

> The first men had to marry their sisters. In view of the simplicity of the first morals, this practice continued without prejudice as long as families remained isolated and even after the most ancient peoples had come together; *but the law that abolished it is no less sacred for being by human institution.* Those who view it solely in terms of the bond it established between families fail to see its most important aspect. In view of the intimacy between the sexes that inevitably attends upon domestic life, the moment such a sacred law ceased to speak to the heart and to awe the senses, men would cease to be upright, and the most frightful morals would soon cause the destruction of mankind. (emphasis added)

The biblical author shares Rousseau's view of the supreme importance of putting an end to incest. The promulgated law that explicitly forbids the practice, given later in Leviticus, is indeed held to be sacred, not only because it is God-given but because it is part of the so-called holiness code of the Children of Israel, who are enjoined to be holy as the Lord is holy. But the need for such a law is anticipated already in the stories of Abraham and Sarah, in which there is movement from the original *sister-become-wife* to *wife-who-is-also-sister* to *wife*, simply. Abraham is led from the natural toward the marital and legal, from an outlook that says that "incest is best" or that "any woman will do" to an outlook that makes instituted exogamous marriage the sacred norm. Let me exag-

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gerate to make the point: Abraham is so to speak "given" a wife who is also his sister in order to educate him—and the reader—in the crucial difference between wife and sister and to lead him—and us—to embrace with understanding the singular meaning of woman as wife.

It remains only to attempt to specify just why this difference is so important. There are, of course, likely psychological and social difficulties with brother-sister sexuality and marriage, especially if there are more than two children. Sex between siblings confounds the sibling relation, which is a relation of parallel but kindred lives (in principle limitless in number) sprung from the same womb, and contaminates it with the exclusive and dyadic attempt to fuse two of these parallel lives in a merger that denies the meaning of "siblinghood." To take a brother as a husband is as much an act of metaphorical fratricide as it is an act of metaphorical "wife-killing" to pass a wife off as a sister. Moreover, motives for literal fratricide are also amply provided by brother-sister sex, owing to sexual jealousy: what would a Cain do if his only sister rejected his advances in favor of an Abel's? Family harmony is difficult enough to maintain without such provocations.

Deeper than these adverse psychosocial consequences lies the matter of how one stands in the world, whether as a child or as an adult. First, in incestuous unions there is no need to learn the adult restraint of sexual impulse, for, with an object of gratification near at hand, instinct spills over into satisfaction: "natural inclination suffice[s] to unite them." More important, in brother-sister marriage, both partners cling as children to the family of origin, in a relation that harkens back to their common emergence out of the same womb, under the protection of the same parents. There is no brave stepping forth unprotected into the full meaning of adulthood, to say permanent good-bye to father and mother and to cleave to your wife, to accept their death and, what is more difficult, to accept your own mortality, the answer to which is not narcissistic sexual gratification but a sober and deliberate saying "yes" to reproduction, transmission, and perpetuation. To consciously take a wife from outside the nest is deliberately to establish a family of perpetuation, in at least tacit recognition that human maturity entails a willingness to die and a desire for renewal and continuity, through birth and cultural transmission.

Finally, in an incestuous union between brother and sister there is no experience of the other as truly other. There is no distance, no sexual strangeness, no need to overcome fumbling, embarrassment, shame: the inward-looking love of one's own flesh is naked but it is not ashamed. For this reason, the other is taken for granted and approached in tacit expectation of full compliance with one's desires; the other is not easily an object of respect. Because of familiarity there is likely to be contempt. There is little possibility of awe (what the Greeks called *aidos*) before the sexual other: awe before the uncanniness of sexual difference, of the radical independence and otherness of the other; awe before the uncanniness of sexual complementarity, of the remarkable possibility of mediating the sexual difference; awe before the mysterious generative power of sexuality, of the wondrous capacity to transcend sexual difference altogether in the creation of a child, who is the parents' own commingled being externalized in a separate and persisting existence. And because there is no awe before the sexual other, there is less likelihood of awe before the divine Other in whose image created He them, male and female.

It is one of the remarkable features of human existence how things wondrous and awesome become familiar and banal, how we live in the world complacently and self-satisfiedly blind to its marvels. Such sightless trust is in some respects helpful, in some respects harmful, but it is nonetheless eerie how much of our lives are lived within this unknowing familiarity. To a child, his family (if it is a healthy family) is a given, a unity, something that appears to him to be as natural as the rising sun. He does not see, unless and until he goes *out* to make his own family, how what appears to be a natural "one" is in fact a two-made-to-become-one. He does not discover, save through the practice of *exo*gamy, how the nursery of his own humanity was the product of deliberate human choice, not of blind nature, and the choice of one man and one woman to become husband and wife for precisely this purpose. Finally, only through exogamy is he likely to appreciate the deepest mysteries of being: the possibility of sameness through otherness, of life through death, of the eternal through the everyday. Man's openness and willing submission to his counterpart properly understood as wife partakes of his openness and willing subordination to the One Who is truly other and Who inspires us—and commands us—to live knowingly, decently, and gratefully in this astonishing world. FT

(This is the first of a two-part essay.)

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The Second Coming of C. S. Lewis

Alan Jacobs

A few years ago, when the English novelist A. N. Wilson announced his repudiation of Christianity, the story was reported in *Christianity Today*. On the face of it this seemed an odd "event" for *CT* to cover. Wilson's novels had often, though not always, shown an interest in religious experience, and since the books were all set in England, the religion treated in them was of course Christianity; but the reader would have no reason to conclude from any of Wilson's novels that he was in fact a Christian believer. He was, but his books bear no witness; far less do they preach. The most that can be said for them along those lines is that by taking spiritual experience seriously they might have the effect of encouraging others to do so. This is indeed something—but enough to justify a *CT* report on their author's apostasy? (Wilson also published, in 1984, a rather fuzzy-minded book about Christian belief called *How Can We Know?*, but since it was not widely read in England, and sank utterly without a trace in the U.S., it is not likely that it had caught the attention of *CT*'s editors.)

No, the notice that *CT* gave to Wilson's declaration of unbelief was produced by his association with a figure whose importance to the magazine's readership is unquestioned: C. S. Lewis. The association was created by Wilson's biography of Lewis, but it was not just in that capacity that Wilson was of interest to Christians in America. Rather, when it became known that Wilson was working on the Lewis biography, all his previous works came under scrutiny and were interpreted in light of a hopeful possibility: perhaps Wilson would be that figure for whom so many have been waiting for so long, The Next C. S. Lewis. His apostasy was newsworthy to *CT* not because Wilson is a noted novelist, nor even, strictly speaking, because he is a Lewis biographer, but rather because it marked the disappointment of those expectations regarding the all-too-long delayed succession.

It is currently fashionable among literary scholars to write histories of reputations. A noted case, some years back, was John Rodden's book *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of "St. George" Orwell*, about which many reviewers rightly complained that Rodden had failed to consider whether the quality of Orwell's mind and writing mightn't have played at least a minor role in the growth of his reputation. I don't want to repeat Rodden's mistake; it would certainly be erroneous to neglect, when considering the popularity of C. S. Lewis, the man's considerable virtues as a scholar, rhetorician, and storyteller. Nevertheless, it is worth considering the possibility that someone else with all those virtues might never have reached Lewis' level of popularity and authority; which is to say that those literary critics who argue that there is a sociology of reputation that operates, at least to a degree, independently of a writer's intrinsic qualities are on to something worth thinking about.

What, then, are the Lewisian paraphernalia that enabled him to become so popular and so influential—especially among American Christians?

The first point to note is, of course, that Lewis was British. This, for Americans, confers an immediate air of culture and sophistication—something of which American Christians, especially of the evangelical variety, have long felt themselves in some need of an infusion. (By way of contrast, among the cultured English, Lewis would be immediately suspect because he was *not* English, but rather an Ulsterman. To Americans, though, a Brit is a Brit.)

This air of sophistication is boosted immeasurably by Lewis' status as an Oxford don. Though he taught at Cambridge for the last ten years of his life, he was always associated in the public mind with Oxford—

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which is good, since, for a variety of reasons far too complicated to go into here (among the more obvious being the Rhodes Scholarships), Oxford has always been more prominent in the American consciousness than Cambridge. Americans are always stunned to learn that no Oxford college can boast the roster of political, intellectual, and artistic titans associated with Trinity College, Cambridge. Moreover, both Oxford and Cambridge still, though not as thoroughly as in the past, dominate their culture in ways that no set of American universities has ever been able to reproduce. The intellectual force of the United States is far more widely distributed; and for that reason, association with any American university, even Harvard or Yale, cannot carry the same weight as Lewis' Oxford connection.

But if Americans are known for their tendency to fawn over certified European cultural sophistication, they are also known for their dislike of pretension, and here too Lewis fits the bill—though in making this point I find myself speaking about a quality that Lewis as a writer actually possesses, as well as the perceptions that quality engenders. I mentioned Orwell earlier, and his case is in this respect remarkably similar to that of Lewis. Each is noted for the direct forcefulness of his style, for his ability to cut straight through his opponents' thickets of obfuscation, for a let-us-clear-our-minds-of-cant bluntness. One thinks of some of the justly famous lines from Orwell's most-quoted essay, "Politics and the English Language": "The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink." And perhaps the most notable example of such bluntness in Lewis comes in *Mere Christianity*, when he responds to the notion that Jesus was a "great moral teacher":

> A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

The styles of the two men, though their beliefs about religion and perhaps politics too were nigh unto opposite, are very close indeed; they both grow out of a peculiarly English tradition of "plain common sense" that can seem to be a bright sunbeam shining into that night of the mind in which all cats are gray. This style itself, or rather the mastery with which Orwell and Lewis employ it, is almost sufficient in itself to explain why their admirers have sometimes dared to use the word "saint" to describe them.

If my descriptions of this style seem ambivalent, that is because I am aware that the blunt commonsense manner tends to disarm the critical faculties, especially of those who already share the beliefs of the writer. The unbeliever, on the other hand, while he or she might admire Lewis' rhetorical facility, might also pause to note that his argument holds only if we agree in advance that the Gospels provide an accurate account of what Jesus said. (It is also, perhaps, worth noting that Lewis' rhetorical style probably cost him as many English admirers as it got him, especially among those who knew him personally and hence saw a yet more pronounced bluntness: even the poet W. H. Auden, who admired Lewis greatly, told a friend that he wished Lewis had been sent to a finishing school.)

Those who take pleasure in the direct unpretentiousness of Lewis' style also tend to be pleased that Lewis was not a professional theologian. Indeed, Lewis frequently insisted on his status as a theological amateur. For instance, in a preface he wrote for *The Screwtape Letters* some years after the book's original appearance, we find these modest words:

> Some have paid me an undeserved compliment by supposing that my *Letters* were the ripe fruit of many years' study in moral and ascetic theology. They forgot that there is an equally reliable, though less creditable, way of learning how temptation works. "My heart"—I need no other's—"showeth me the wickedness of the ungodly."

There is no reason to doubt that Lewis meant wholeheartedly what he said here, and yet it is also true that he was deeply learned in the history of Christian theology, as anyone who has read his works of literary history (which are filled with remarkable interdisciplinary erudition) can attest; and while he does not directly employ that erudition in *Screwtape*, there is no doubt that he drew upon it in formulating his understanding of diabolical activity. But even though Lewis had read more theology than many theologians, the fact that he was not by profession a theologian helped him doubly: not only did it fit nicely with his unpretentious style, it also enabled him to recognize, more readily than a professional absorbed in the concerns of his discipline, which disputes are too recondite to interest the reader with limited theological knowledge.

That Lewis was a storyteller and lover of stories as well as a philosopher and lover of argument was very important. I know of a married couple—there must

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be thousands of similar stories—who got to know one another because each claimed C. S. Lewis as a favorite writer; even though *his* Lewis was the author of *Miracles* and *hers* was the author of the Narnia books. Since Lewis wrote stories and arguments concurrently, almost from the beginning of his career (poetry, actually, was his first love and hope for literary fame), one could never plausibly accuse him of being either a too-rigid rationalist or a fuzzy-brained weaver of tales.

And finally, that Lewis was an Anglican, and therefore liable to be claimed with almost equal plausibility by people on both sides of that *via media*, helped to minimize denominational bickering—especially in America—and keep his audience broadly distributed through Christendom. (In this respect it is perhaps fortunate that his decision to use—as purportedly the most even-handed term to describe Christians who follow Rome—the word "Papist" comes in one of his more scholarly and less widely read books. Even the mature Lewis still had something of the Ulster Prot in his bones.)

If a pattern has emerged through this enumeration of contributing factors to C. S. Lewis' influence, it is that he represents a remarkable number of both/ands: both learned and unpretentious, both logical and artistic, both Catholic and Protestant. It is the *collection* of qualities, and perceived qualities, that would be so enormously hard to replicate. And that is why so many potential successors have gone by the wayside. Both G. K. Chesterton—whose reputation in this country (like that of George Macdonald) derives in considerable part from Lewis' praise of him—and Malcolm Muggeridge, as mere journalists, lacked the intellectual pedigree of the Oxford don. Moreover, Chesterton's reputation among non-Catholics, though bolstered by *his* work in both fiction and argumentation, has been hurt by what became his enthusiastic embrace of Catholicism and subsequent critique of Protestantism; while Muggeridge's heterodoxy on some significant doctrinal issues, plus his frequently and cheerfully confessed ignorance of theology, have limited his influence too. Dorothy Sayers also lacked the don's stature, but one suspects that her gender is the more important reason for the relative neglect of her interesting apologetic works. A more recent candidate, in the minds of some, is the extraordinarily (some would say dismayingly) prolific Alister McGrath, who, after receiving his doctorate in biochemistry, abandoned science for theological studies and is now a lecturer in theology at Oxford. But however impressive his resumé may be, McGrath's instincts as a professional theologian don't always serve him well in his popular works. He does not possess Lewis' knack for knowing when to simplify and when to pursue an issue in depth; and, more important in my view, his prose style is at best pedestrian, completely lacking in the rhetorical flair that each of the other candidates I have mentioned possessed in considerable measure (as does, I might add, A. N. Wilson).

The vocabulary employed throughout this essay requires some examination: What does it mean here to talk about "candidates" and "the succession"? Candidates for what? Succession to what? The position held by Lewis is, I believe, that of Unofficial Spokesman for Orthodox Christianity; and I also believe that many Christians tend to assume that someone has always held, or should hold, that position, when in fact Lewis has been virtually unique in this respect. Chesterton before him—whom Lewis clearly considered his great predecessor—never had the broad authority that Lewis would come to assume; and once you go back beyond Chesterton, into a Victorian world that was at least nominally Christian through and through, the idea of such a spokesman for the faith quickly becomes anachronistic.

Thus the idea that we Christians should be looking for the next Lewis, and moreover should be deeply concerned if we do not find him (or her), may well be fundamentally misbegotten—very like the increasing concern among evangelicals about who will succeed Billy Graham. (He had no real predecessors either—what I said about Chesterton applies in equal measure to Billy Sunday, whose reputation and influence grew after his death.) For both Lewis and Graham there is no reason to suppose that there will be a successor in any meaningful sense of the term. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the Christian church will be worse off if no successor is found. The real danger, in fact, is that obsessive scanning of the intellectual skies for The Next C. S. Lewis will prevent thinking Christians from taking action themselves to meet the challenges of our time—as Lewis sought, with considerable success, to meet the challenges of his. I mean this in two senses.

First, there is the danger that people will wait for the titanic new figure to stride onto the stage instead of settling down themselves to the business of defending the faith. It is worth remembering that when Lewis started writing his apologetic works there was no way for him or anyone else to know how enormous his authority would eventually become. He considered himself just one Christian writer among many, not even *primus inter pares*. He was perfectly aware that his approach to the Christian faith—though he strove to make it as uncontroversial as possible—would not appeal to all readers; there is not the slightest inclination in Lewis' life or work that he thought discomfort with his writings amounted to discomfort with Christianity. And yet for many of Lewis' admirers this distinction is hard to make.

Second, there is the danger that Lewis will so dominate our picture of what a Christian apologist

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should be that we will be looking for someone to address the challenges of fifty years ago, not today—someone who has a response to Freud or Marx but not to Richard Rorty or Andrea Dworkin. Lewis wrote in a time when, among the educated British public if not among their professional philosophers, there was considerably more agreement than there is now about, for instance, what constitutes a valid and rational argument for a given case. (Though Screwtape—whom Lewis should have listened to a little more carefully on this point—notes in his very first letter that the historical period has passed in which "the humans still knew pretty well when a thing was proved and when it was not.") His apologetic works presuppose, and rarely make any argument for, the criteria for rationality themselves. Today those criteria simply cannot be assumed, and yet many Christians still persist in assuming them. Not long ago in *Christianity Today* a guest columnist pointed to a troubling finding from a recent poll: only 28 percent of Americans claim to have a strong belief in absolute truth. Confronted with this disturbing news, the columnist's recommendation was that preachers need to devote more homiletic time to "set[ting] forth the exclusive claims of Christ as rationally superior" to other alternatives.

Perhaps I am missing something, but it seems to me truly extraordinary to expect that people who do not believe in absolute truth will, all the same, believe in rational argument. In fact, it is almost certain that they will not believe in rational argument, and in response to the "exclusive claims" of Christ will take refuge in relativism or, more likely, a pragmatic perspectivism—that is, in its simplest form, the "That's great if it works for you, but it doesn't work for me" response. (In England it's known as the "Right you are if you think you are" response.) One may be able to provide a powerful summation of evidence for the empty tomb, but that will not convince the unbeliever who is skeptical about the very notion of "evidence" and who can discourse learnedly about "plausibility structures" and "paradigm shifts"—nor will it move that other variety of unbeliever who is far more likely to believe that Jesus gave sight to the blind and rose from the dead than to believe that no one comes to the Father except through Him.

For these and other reasons it is an open question whether orthodox Christians' continued fascination with Lewis is a good or a bad thing. There is much to be gained from reading him; I say this as one who has over the last fifteen years drawn considerable spiritual nourishment from his cornucopia of works, and who expects to draw more in the future. But more attention must be given to following his example rather than imitating his productions—that is, to making the case for Christianity to *our* world rather than to his. Lewis wrote most of his major apologetic works more than fifty years ago, and in this century fifty years is a long, long time. Moreover, we must acknowledge that the likelihood of finding another such figure—that is, a single Christian writer endowed with comparable gifts and an equally ideal positioning for cultural authority—is very slight, and perhaps not worthy of our hopes. To be sure, what is true for all of us is equally true for Christian apologists: many are called, few are chosen. But we need not reduce the few to a solitary one. FT

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On Bringing One's Life to a Point

Gilbert Meilaender

In February of 1994, in what was its March issue, First Things published a statement on the homosexual movement, signed by twenty-one people, of whom I was one. An excerpt from that statement was published in the *Wall Street Journal* on February 24. I do not intend here to rehearse the argument of that statement or to defend it. In my own view, it was certainly not perfect, and I see ways we could have made it better. Moreover, I think the *Wall Street Journal* excerpt was inadequate, losing part of the point of the statement. But I have not changed my mind on the question involved; and a reader, in order to understand what follows, will have to keep that in mind, and, if he or she disagrees with the statement, bracket such disagreement for the moment.

The day the *Wall Street Journal* excerpt appeared, things began to explode on the campus of Oberlin College, where I teach. Since Oberlin has been described by *Newsweek*, for example, as a "gay mecca," perhaps this was not surprising, though I could never have predicted the intensity of the reaction. In order to provide a context for what follows, I must describe briefly here the reaction at Oberlin. But just as I do not seek to rehearse again the argument on the issue, so I also do not intend here to take up the topic of "political correctness." My experiences provide in many ways a textbook example of that phenomenon, but I am interested in something I regard as ultimately more important.

What happened? Posters went up around the campus, xeroxes of the *WSJ* piece, with arrows pointing to my name and various statements written on the posters ("rampant homophobia," "read this and fear"). Over the next few days several more rounds of posters appeared, attacking me, for example, as "super bigot." It is not too much to say that an uproar had been created. Students expressed outrage that such views were held by someone at Oberlin. They called for a boycott of my classes this fall (since I was on leave during the spring semester of 1994). One student was quoted in the student paper as calling for a march past my home, though I did not expect that to take place and it did not. The student senate voted to reprimand me, and the student paper editorialized against me, charging that I had compromised my "academic objectivity." Students talked publicly about bringing charges against me through the college's judicial system, and a student who is cochair of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Union was quoted as saying, "Some people would like him out of here." Fifty-one members of the faculty (about a quarter of the total) signed a letter criticizing the statement on homosexuality—charging that it engaged in "repugnant stereotyping," was "intellectually naive," and provided "sanction for a homophobic agenda."

For at least the first week, while the uproar was at its height, I felt largely isolated—an experience that is almost paralyzing, since one hardly knows how to respond under such a circumstance. Over time, at least the appearance (though not, in truth, the reality) of some balance was restored when letters providing support of various kinds for me appeared in the next week's edition of the student paper. (I myself did respond in writing to the letter signed by members of the faculty.) Some defended the right of free speech, some testified to my good character (which I appreciated greatly, though there is something unsettling about having to be defended on such grounds), and a very few expressed substantive agreement with my views. A couple of brave students wrote letters expressing such support. One member of the faculty did so. At this point he remains the only member of the faculty who has publicly expressed agreement with the position adopted by me and other signers of the First Things statement.

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Events such as these remind us that, despite torrents of talk about diversity at our elite colleges, they lack anything resembling genuine intellectual diversity. But, although this much summary has been necessary to give the reader some context for the reflections that follow, I repeat that I do not intend here to add another chapter to debates about political correctness. What follows is, as best I can manage, "emotion recollected in tranquility." Although I have over the years defended in print a number of positions that are relatively unpopular in our society, this experience is unlike any other I have had. And I have found myself reflecting on what it means to bring one's life to a point—which is, on the one hand, a place of solitude, and, on the other, a moment of significance. (The irony has not escaped my attention that this is not unlike the way gays sometimes speak about the experience of "coming out of the closet." But to take up here the similarities and differences would draw me back into substantive discussion of the argument, which is not my aim. The reader who disagrees with my normative views is simply going to have to stop reading or prescind from such judgment for a while.)

I

The experience involved for me an act of *recovery*—and this in several ways. In the midst of unrelenting public attack, one regains some sense of what counts in one's life—not what I would like to count, but what does in fact count for me, what matters to the person I have become. In that sense I recovered myself within my deepest commitments.

Thus, for example, I reclaimed the significance of the local community of believers. The Lutheran congregation that I attend (which I attend for the simple reason that it is here in Oberlin) is neither particularly large nor noteworthy. It has the virtues and the vices of many small congregations, and I have to admit that worshiping there seldom stirs my soul deeply. But, as the apostle writes, we are many members with many gifts, but one body in which burdens are mutually borne. The reaction of many people in the congregation (when a local newspaper carried an article about the controversy at the college) was immediate and powerful. They spoke words of support in conversations with me. Several said something like, "I would like to write a letter on your behalf, but I know I probably wouldn't get it right, so I am praying for you." Which was, of course, precisely right. And, although I am by temperament a person not eager to be prayed for publicly, when the pastor included me in the special intercessions of the prayer of the church, I found it affecting and appropriate. Many members with many gifts—I am probably better at offering arguments, but they did what they did better than I might have were the tables turned. One body—reminding me how foolish I would be if I thought, finally, that I could offer arguments simply on my own apart from the way of faith and life that the entire body sustains.

There are, however, other ties that are also very important in a person's life—chief among them, at least for me, the bond of the family. A few years ago I wrote a little piece titled "I Want To Burden My Loved Ones" (FT, October 1991). It was written in fun, but also in all seriousness, arguing—in relation to questions about care for dying patients and advance directives about one's own care at the point of death—that the impulse to handle these problems autonomously was mistaken, that the family was a context in which we are quite properly burdened by others. And my recent experience—at, remember, a small college in a small town, where anyone's business is everyone's business—reminded me of how deeply implicated we are in the lives of our family. One might think that my signature on a document does not involve my wife or children, but life teaches otherwise. The experience intrudes into their own lives in conversations with friends or teachers, and they are, in a sense, forced to make it their own. They didn't ask for it, but it found them. And if I have burdened them, as I have, perhaps I have also—to the best of my ability—helped them to understand how important it may be to bring one's life to a point.

I recovered also some of the psalms that I have never quite known what to do with, psalms that have been a puzzle for me. Christians use them regularly in worship, but what are we thinking when we do so? A few examples, which could readily be multiplied, may suffice:

> Be gracious to me, O LORD!
> Behold what I suffer from those who hate me,
> O thou who liftest me up from the gates of death,
> that I may recount all thy praises,
> that in the gates of the daughter of Zion
> I may rejoice in thy deliverance. (9:13-14)

> Keep me as the apple of the eye;
> hide me in the shadow of thy wings,
> from the wicked who despoil me,
> my deadly enemies who surround me.
> They close their hearts to pity;
> with their mouths they speak arrogantly.
> They track me down; now they surround me;
> they set their eyes to cast me to the ground.
> (17:8-11)

> Consider how many are my foes,
> and with what violent hatred they hate me.
> Oh guard my life, and deliver me;
> let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in thee. (25:19-20)

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Save me, O God, by thy name,
and vindicate me by thy might.
Hear my prayer, O God;
give ear to the words of my mouth.
For insolent men have risen against me,
ruthless men seek my life;
they do not set God before them. (54:1-3)

Enough. We get the picture—of one who has attempted in integrity to be faithful to God, who because of that is surrounded by enemies, and who brings that situation before God. I suspect that most Christians are uneasy with making the prayers of such righteous Israelites their own. We are uneasy because such claims to our own integrity are difficult for those who with St. Paul have taken seriously the deep division even within the self that seeks to serve God and have learned to claim Christ as their righteousness.

This note of the righteous sufferer is, of course, not the only note sounded in the Psalter. A Lutheran pastor, having heard of the controversy raging at Oberlin, wrote to thank me for the position I had taken and to offer encouragement and support. But she also, very nicely, reminded me not to suppose that this cause was simply my own to assert, and she in turn cited the psalmist (19:13):

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

That is, of course, one very important way to deal with psalms that are puzzling and troubling in their protestations of righteousness. We set them in the context of other psalms which remind us that we cannot plumb the depths of our own self and must finally hand that self over to God for judgment and safekeeping.

But what do we do with the psalms themselves—those that assert one's integrity and ask for deliverance from enemies that surround one? I myself have generally made two moves in dealing with them. The first I learned from C. S. Lewis, who suggests that we place ourselves not with the righteous sufferer but with the evildoers—that, in making such psalms our own prayers, we remember soberly that we might have brought others to a point where they felt as isolated as the psalmist sometimes feels. The second—and for Christians ultimately more telling—I learned from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who reminds us that we make these prayers our own only when we see Jesus as this righteous sufferer. We pray them as our own only "in him," *the* righteous sufferer who calls on God for vindication.

Bonhoeffer's reading is, I think, the first and the last reading that a Christian ought to give such psalms—but, I now believe, not the only one. For between those first and last readings may come another that is closer to the psalmist's own experience, one that enters into the text's own trajectory (as we like to say these days). For this is, in fact, what it may feel like to try—as best one can—to be faithful. No one should seek such experience, and perhaps we should even be hesitant about assuming that it is our own, but if others persuade us that they do indeed surround us, then we can pray these psalms as our own, as—perhaps—that righteous Israelite did. Cautious as Christians must inevitably be to make such a move, I am not prepared to say we cannot or ought not.

But, of course, the final reading remains that in which they are the prayer of Jesus, and it did not escape my attention that this entire experience took place during Lent. How casually I tend to read the New Testament texts that speak of sharing in Christ's sufferings and even most puzzlingly (in Colossians) of completing "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." One could, melodramatically, make too much of such passages—as Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch early in the second century, so famously did in a letter written on the way to his martyrdom: "Let me be fodder for wild beasts—that is how I can get to God. I am God's wheat and I am being ground by the teeth of wild beasts to make a pure loaf for Christ." The spirit that could seek such experience is, I confess, alien to my own. But to accept what comes when one has attempted to be faithful, and to make it one's own by drawing it into an *imitatio Christi*, seems right to me, and surely Lent exists in part to ask us to take such possibilities seriously in life. We read these psalms as the prayer of Jesus, accepting—even if not seeking—a share in the sufferings of his Body. Some people said to me at the height of the uproar: "It will pass; a new cause will come along." Which is true. (Indeed, a little more than a month later the college's administration was kind enough to provide through one of its personnel decisions a new cause, a new object for hostility, thereby providing me some breathing space.) But the passing of a moment is not the same as taking it up and bringing one's life to a point around it. When the moment passes, life continues, more or less as it had before. But if we take up the moment, accepting a certain kind of death that it brings, we may be renewed—which is quite different from the simple continuation of life.

II

Beyond the recovery of such obvious truths, an experience like mine may also uncover some of the deeper meaning of the moral life, meaning that cannot be taught in the classroom. At one point, a couple weeks into the uproar, I had a short conversa-

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tion with a faculty colleague, a little older than I, whose judgment I respect and whose counsel I have often sought. Although sympathetic to the concerns of the statement I had signed, he could not himself affirm its view, though he could and did offer support from his own perspective. But when we spoke, he commented that the standard upheld in the statement was a very "difficult" and "demanding" one. (He had in mind the larger concerns of the statement, its concern not simply with the homosexual movement but with the results of the sexual revolution more generally in our society. And, in fact, some of the strongest language in the statement—language entirely omitted from the *WSJ* excerpt—dealt with standards that applied to heterosexuals.) Our standard, he said to me, was such a demanding one that he was reluctant to affirm it. He could not say that he himself had always lived up to it.

That set me to thinking about how we render moral judgment today. Beginning perhaps with the generous thought that we should not "impose" on others standards that we ourselves do not meet, we end with a morality that demands less even of ourselves than we ought. The norms to which I adhere are not those I can keep or do keep; they are those to which I hold myself accountable. I do not see how I could manage that if there were not ways to recognize my accountability—if, that is, I were not part of a community that regularly confesses its sin and seeks to begin anew. Only from such a perspective, I suspect, could I have the courage to set forth an ideal of which I myself may often fall short. The moral life is much more than we can or should teach in a classroom; it involves disciplines such as confession and absolution.

Still more, the moral life involves—how not to put the point too melodramatically?—preparing to die. Thus, Epictetus: "Let others study cases at law, let others practice recitations and syllogisms. You learn to die." Thus also Socrates, who speaks of pursuing philosophy in the right way as practicing "how to face death easily." And in death we are, finally, isolated and alone. Others may and should do what Paul Ramsey called "companying" with the dying, they may through the virtue of love actually help to carry our sufferings, but they cannot enter the void with us. Christians believe, of course, that One has kept us company even there, but that belief is experienced as hope, not possession. To learn to die, therefore, we have to learn to be alone.

This we are very reluctant to do—at least I certainly am. We value the ways in which our lives are joined with others in bonds of life, family, property, and reputation (the very bonds to which the second table of the Decalog points). Therefore, it is rather hard to sing sincerely the words of Luther's great hymn (at least as that hymn was translated before we settled for less poetic translations designed to avoid allegedly sexist language): "And take they our life / Goods, fame, child, and wife, / Let these all be gone, / They yet have nothing won; / The kingdom ours remaineth." Most of the time, if the truth were known, I probably prefer my good name with my colleagues to such a sentiment. And it is therefore useful—indeed, it is central to the moral life—to bring one's life to a point, even if that is experienced as a point of solitude and isolation. This also cannot be taught in the ethics classroom, but this is what it means to begin to learn to die.

Once we come to see that our self is at stake in such moments, we will get quite a different slant on the truth we think we understand. It cannot be simply my personal view, my personal cause. For that alone I would scarcely risk or endure isolation. Few "opinions" of mine are likely to mean as much to me as my good name among colleagues. So if it is *my* cause that is at stake, that good name is likely to trump other considerations. No, the truth we think we understand must have about it an impersonality; it cannot simply be one's own private view or opinion. The truth I think I understand and for which I must stand up is, in reality, a truth that I stand under and to which I look up. To put the point again in the language of hymnody, in such moments I prefer "Beneath the Cross of Jesus / I long to take my stand" to "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus."

That the truth we understand must be a truth we stand under is brought out nicely in C. S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength* when Mark Studdock gradually learns what an "Idea" is. While Frost attempts to give Mark a "training in objectivity" that will destroy in him any natural moral sense, and while Mark tries desperately to find a way out of the moral void into which he is being drawn, he discovers what it means to under-stand. "He had never before known what an Idea meant: he had always thought till now that they were things inside one's own head. But now, when his head was continually attacked and often completely filled with the clinging corruption of the training, this Idea towered up above him—something which obviously existed quite independently of himself and had hard rock surfaces which would not give, surfaces he could cling to." This too, I fear, is seldom communicated in the classroom, where opinion reigns supreme. But it has important implications for the way we understand argument. During the course of the uproar at Oberlin I discovered to my surprise that the cause I defended had become genuinely an impersonal one—not my own. It was not the sort of thing over which one could become personally irritated or annoyed. Indeed, I have on occasion over the years been far more annoyed by minor criticisms of my writings than by the direct and personal attack I now experienced. For it was impossible to regard the position I defended as my own; indeed, I cannot imagine subjecting myself to such criticism for the sake of anything so minor as an "opinion" of

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mine. In such moments one needs a truth with hard surfaces to cling to and stand under, and this experience has renewed my fear that the teaching of ethics alone seldom offers such truth.

III

If trying to stand under the truth means the practice of an *ars moriendi*, we begin to see what the moral life really requires. I have been reminded of two favorite passages of mine, the first from Peter Geach, the second from C. S. Lewis.

> Every man is given sufficient grace to make the right choice, but many reject that grace and are lost. How this choice does come a man's way, what chances men have and how they take or reject them, we shall not know till the Day of Judgment. In the stories of the Vikings there is recorded that one Viking was named Bairnsfriend because he would not share in the popular sport of tossing infants from spearpoint to spearpoint; let us hope that he took his chance; in such ways the Grace of God may show itself despite the most corrupting environment.

And from C. S. Lewis:

> In *King Lear* (III:vii) there is a man who is such a minor character that Shakespeare has not given him even a name: he is merely "First Servant." All the characters around him—Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund—have fine long-term plans. They think they know how the story is going to end, and they are quite wrong. The servant has no such delusions. He has no notion how the play is going to go. But he understands the present scene. He sees an abomination (the blinding of old Gloucester) taking place. He will not stand it. His sword is out and pointed at his master's breast in a moment: then Regan stabs him dead from behind. That is his whole part: eight lines all told. But if it were real life and not a play, that is the part it would be best to have acted.

Two examples, each quite literally of bringing one's life to a point. And although our opportunities generally come in far less dramatic ways, we can learn from such examples what is and what is not within our power.

It has occurred to me any number of times that were I deliberately to aim to bring my life to a point, the issue of homosexuality would not have been the issue I would have chosen for the occasion. And, again, had I intended to bring my life to a point—a point of solitude, but also of significance and discovery—I would have done things a little differently. Certainly I would have changed a word here and there!

But, in fact, we do not decide to bring our lives to a point. We are brought. The most important things have always been decided in advance and are not ours to determine. We can seize the occasion and seek to live faithfully, but we are ultimately not makers but responders. Hence, any account of the moral life is inadequate if it does not help us learn how to deal with what may come upon us without our choice—illness, suffering, a child, death. Few of the current approaches to morality do this or even seek to do it. If, therefore, we are not, like Prufrock, to measure out our lives with coffee spoons, we need to reclaim an older wisdom that may help us learn what it means to bring one's life to a point. FT

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The Church-State Game: A Symposium on *Kiryas Joel*

On June 27, 1994, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its decision in the case of Kiryas Joel v. Grumet. *The Court ruled that the New York State legislature had acted unconstitutionally in establishing a school district specifically to meet the needs of members of the Satmar Hasidic Jewish sect. Because of the importance of the decision for church-state jurisprudence, the editors asked four experts on the subject to offer their opinions on the case.*

William Bentley Ball

Reading the Supreme Court's opinion in the *Kiryas Joel* case caused me suddenly to think of Americans' love of sports. Baseball, football, golf, tennis, basketball, soccer—all fascinate us, and they are all, in a sense, absurd. The essence of a sport is to confine physical activity within artificial limitations of time and space. Golfers, pitchers, nose guards, and teams must observe the complex of limitations that define the game. And that is where the absurdity comes in.

That big fellow who failed to touch his foot against third as he rounded the bases is "out," by the rules. The simple observer may ask: "Why? He knocked the ball out of the park; so what if he didn't step on one base?" The golfer whose ball lands in the drink must drop it (not *place* it) in an inches-wide spot of turf before being allowed to drive it toward the hole. And if the point is really to get it there, why can't he just grab it and heave it at the green? Because the rules, however arbitrary, are the game.

What has all this to do with *Kiryas Joel*?

For about half a century, the Supreme Court has been at work making a game out of the Constitution's Establishment Clause. This it has accomplished through a constant process of *inventing* ideas and trotting those forth as authoritative "interpretations" of the original constitutional text. These artifices become the rules of the game. In 1947 the Court read into the Establishment Clause the phrase "wall of separation between church and state," and held the "wall" to bar all governmental aid to religion. The phrase was lifted out of context from a letter written by Thomas Jefferson; its appropriation by the Court to apply to the Constitution was contrary to historical evidence. Once the "high and impregnable" wall was installed, the Court was free to confront religious liberty with notions for heightening the wall. In 1963 the Court, in the *Schempp* case, voiding Bible-reading in the public schools, held that the Establishment Clause is violated by any governmental action having a "primary effect advancing religion." This, too, was out of whole cloth. In 1971, in the *Lemon* case, the Court told the nation that the Clause also barred "excessive entanglements" between religion and the state—again, brand-new, home-made doctrine. The "entanglement" concept had never appeared in any writings of the Constitution's framers, nor even in any prior Supreme Court opinion. It is not surprising that, as the inventions multiplied, the Court would propagate variations of the inventions themselves. So in 1985 the Court took its "primary effect advancing religion" idea and held that a "primary effect" could consist of governmental actions that create a "symbolic union" of government and religion.

By the open-ended phrasing of these constitutional add-ons, the justices have provided themselves blank checks that they can fill in according to their personal biases. But in Establishment Clause litigation, it is those add-ons, the inventions, that counsel in litigations must deal with. They now constitute the game. For the sake of your client, you must present your case as though the inventions are for real, as though they are constitutional law, as though "symbolic union" is not nonsense, as though "primary effect" is

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not up-for-grabs vagary. Since I am not now in Washington about to present argument before the Court, but am instead up here in the fresh, rational atmosphere of First Things, let me describe for you *Kiryas Joel* as it was played, with particular attention to the niceties of the game.

The case, on its facts, was a simple affair. Under a New York statute, Satmars (members of a Hasidic religious group) had been enabled to establish a religiously exclusive municipality; under a subsequent statute (Chapter 748, 1989), that municipality had been constituted a public school district. Disabled children of Satmars needed special education services and were entitled by federal and state law to have them provided by public teachers. These children, for religious and psychological reasons, needed to receive those services on the familiar premises of their religious village. But the 1985 decision of the Supreme Court in the *Aguilar* case had barred public teachers from serving on religious premises. Chapter 748 addressed the *Aguilar* difficulty: public teachers could serve the Satmar children on the premises of their village, these premises now being *public* school premises. The people of a state, acting through their legislature, had successfully solved a human problem. The matter was devoid of constitutional significance. The Satmars, for their part, had never contended that their village had any constitutional right to become a public school district. They were pleased to gain the accommodation of the statute. How, then, did the accommodation come to be voided by the Supreme Court on constitutional grounds? Two reasons seem likely.

First, there was the claim of powerful public education advocates that the existence of the Kiryas Joel Village School District threatened public education. Second, there was the conjuring of a supposed Establishment Clause issue. As to the first, the New York legislature had discovered no such threat. The claim was without a wraith of fact to sustain it. But, as they now made manifest, six justices of the Supreme Court (four with almost religious fervor) plainly regard public education as a sacrosanct institution whose wishes must be catered to except in the rarest of instances. As to the constitutional claim, the New York Court of Appeals had already held the challenged law unconstitutional, as creating "a symbolic union of church and state." Why, then, did the Supreme Court agree to hear Kiryas Joel's appeal only to *affirm* the New York court? The answer can but lie in the eagerness of the Court to re-express its secularist view of the Establishment Clause. And for that it resorted to its arsenal of artifices—to the game, in other words.

The opinion of Justice David Souter, writing for the Court, rested on an accumulation of artifices, apparently because he found no single one satisfactory. He said that Chapter 748 delegated state authority to a religious community—that amounting to a "fusion" of governmental and religious functions; and *that* equaling an "excessive entanglement" of each with the other; and *that* amounting to a "symbolic union" of both. Off on his facts, he cited for legal precedents a string of cases not on point. Then, as though to add weight to his contentions, he resorted to reliance on a future nonevent, namely, that there was no assurance that if some other religious community in the future would like to become a school district, the legislature would allow it to. His opinion then trailed off into irrelevant ruminations about how public policy has related to public education.

Justice Antonin Scalia was joined by Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justice Clarence Thomas in a furious dissent. Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Anthony Kennedy, expressing discomfort over the *Schempp-Lemon* artifice, nevertheless went along with the secularist wing of the Court (Souter, Harry Blackmun, John Paul Stevens, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg). O'Connor also urged that *Aguilar* be overruled.

Much speculation has followed the *Kiryas Joel* decision. One commentator assures us that the decision is not a "Pearl Harbor" respecting religious accommodations by government, but is instead a narrow ruling in a case of unique facts. Others have wondered if the combined opinions do not point to a more coherent Establishment Clause jurisprudence in which the *Schempp-Lemon* test will be ignored. *Kiryas Joel* is indeed a case of unusual facts, but that makes it all the more unfortunate. The Court utilized a case of even such facts to restate, reinforce, and even add to its nonconstitutional notionware. Perhaps in a future case the Court will narrowly overrule *Aguilar*, but that small tolerance will do little toward reaching the goal of parental economic freedom of religious choice in education. There is now every prospect that six members of the Court will continue the secularizing process: the opinion of Judge Stephen Breyer in the *New Life Baptist Academy* case when he served on the First Circuit indicates that newly confirmed Justice Breyer will play by the rules of the game.

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Douglas Laycock

Kiryas Joel should have been a simple one-issue case. The relevant legal principle was never in dispute. States may not confer governmental author-

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ity on religious organizations; letting a religious organization run its own government is not a permissible means of accommodation.

The only serious issue in the case was whether this principle had been violated. Should deliberate creation of a government unit with all Satmar voters be treated as functionally equivalent to conferring governmental authority on the Satmar religious organization?

There were plausible arguments either way, although I think that those who saw functional equivalence had much the better of the argument. But whichever answer you prefer, this was the issue. The Supreme Court failed to give a clear answer.

Four justices—Souter, Blackmun, Stevens, and Ginsburg—found a "forbidden fusion of government and religious functions." They got a fifth vote for a similar formulation from Justice Kennedy, who said that New York was "drawing political boundaries on the basis of religion." That should have decided the case.

But the Souter four got a fifth vote from Justice O'Connor for the alternate proposition that New York had singled out the Satmar for a special benefit, with no guarantee that it would make a similar benefit available to other religious groups similarly situated. Government should not single out particular religions for special benefits, but that principle is irrelevant when the "benefit" is independently unconstitutional. The logical extreme of the singling-out theory would be to organize all local government on religious lines. But that would be a constitutional nightmare, not a solution.

The singling-out theory opened an apparent loophole in the opinions, and the New York legislature defiantly sought to exploit it. The new law authorized municipalities to create their own school districts, subject to five voting requirements and seven eligibility conditions that reportedly fit only Kiryas Joel. Municipalities created in the future are ineligible, so no other religious minority can use this law unless it had the foresight to create a municipality of the right configuration before the law was enacted. The alleged generality of the new law is a sham, and even if it were real, the purpose and effect is still a forbidden fusion of government and religious authority and a drawing of political boundaries on religious lines.

At the big picture level, *Kiryas Joel* is consistent with the pattern of recent cases. What news there is comes in the separate opinions. Justice O'Connor is apparently willing to abandon her endorsement test as a universal standard, and confine it to cases of "government speech on religious topics." That is where the endorsement test originated, and in my judgment that is where it makes sense.

Five justices—O'Connor, Kennedy, Scalia, Rehnquist, and Thomas—announced their willingness to reconsider *Aguilar v. Felton,* which requires that federal remedial funds for impoverished children be expended off the site of religious schools. Four of these five—all but O'Connor—said they would also reconsider *Grand Rapids v. Ball,* which held that public schools could not offer supplemental courses on the site of religious schools. *Aguilar* could be overruled without doctrinal disruption by reclassifying the program, treating it as social services for those with a special disadvantage and not as general education. *Grand Rapids* is harder to reclassify; overruling *Grand Rapids* might have much larger doctrinal implications for the financing of religious schools.

At the biggest picture level, there remains the *Lemon* test, diverting everyone's attention and largely irrelevant to results. Like every other recent Establishment Clause case, *Kiryas Joel* was surrounded by media hype about whether this time *Lemon* would be "overruled." That was never in the cards; there are at most four justices, and perhaps only three, who want any kind of radical change in Establishment Clause jurisprudence. But as the threat of a radical repudiation of *Lemon* recedes, the Court's other wing might feel safe in making incremental clarifications.

The *Lemon* test is useless because it is a confused amalgam of inadequately specified elements from separate theories. The first two prongs, that a statute's purpose and effect must neither advance nor inhibit religion, were taken almost verbatim from earlier explanations of neutrality. But these explanations never indicated whether the Court meant formal or substantive neutrality. Formal neutrality would mean no special rules for religion, which means no accommodation of burdens on religion. Substantive neutrality would mean that government should minimize the extent to which it either encourages or discourages religion; when government imposes burdens that discourage religion, the most neutral course is usually to lift the burden.

The *Lemon* formulation has the additional problem that it disaggregates the search for neutrality into two separate inquiries: Has government advanced religion? And, has government inhibited religion? And so by an inadvertent linguistic substitution, many lower courts now ask only whether government has advanced religion. The original focus on neutrality has been lost.

The Court has never clarified the so-called test, but its results speak for themselves. Except for cases that the Court views as involving core educational functions, legislatures are generally free to pursue either formal neutrality or substantive neutrality toward religion. Laws that lift regulatory burdens on religion do not "advance religion" within the meaning of *Lemon.* Unlike government prayers or religious observances, removing a burden cannot motivate anyone to be attracted to the burdened faith in the

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first place. But imposing a burden can motivate people to leave the faith, and it can penalize them for staying in. The encouraging effect of a religious exemption is usually minimal compared to the discouraging effect of a penalty or loss of government benefits.

Under the Court's cases, religious minorities may be exempted from burdensome regulation (*Corporation of the Presiding Bishop v. Amos* [9-0]), receive social services on an equal basis with other citizens (*Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District* [5-2-2], *Witters v. Washington Dept. of Services for the Blind* [9-0]), participate on an equal basis in the institutional delivery of social services (*Bowen v. Kendrick* [5-4]), and speak in public places on an equal basis with other speakers (*Lamb's Chapel v. Center Moriches Union Free School District* [9-0], *Board of Education v. Mergens* [8-1], *Widmar v. Vincent* [8-1]).

As shown by the bracketed indications of votes on the result (opinions were often more fractured), most of these recent decisions were not close. And all but one of the dissenters in these cases were motivated by special concerns about education.

The remarkable thing is that all but one of these cases reversed the lower court. The one exception is *Mergens,* where the Court reviewed the only court of appeals that had permitted religious clubs to meet after school. In all these cases, the lower courts erred, misled principally by the *Lemon* test.

Kiryas Joel continues in this pattern. The problem in *Kiryas Joel* was not that New York sought to accommodate the special need of disabled Satmar children, but that its chosen method violated the core requirements of institutional separation. The New York Court of Appeals relied heavily on the second prong of the *Lemon* test; its opinions are full of talk about how New York had advanced and endorsed Satmar Hasidism. There is no such talk in any of the Supreme Court opinions; there is no hint that lifting burdens unconstitutionally advances religion.

Given this pattern in the cases, why do so many sensible people persist in believing that accommodations advance religion in violation of the *Lemon* test? It is partly reckless and exaggerated advocacy on both sides. It is partly that there are real costs when the most visible formulation of doctrine does not reflect the Court's real working principles. It is partly that for many on both sides the most important issue is the funding of religious education, and a majority of the Court has treated education as a separate category, distinct from social services. If a case is classified as education, it is subject to its own set of rules, different from the rules for social services, regulatory exemptions, and religious speech, even though both sets of rules operate under the common umbrella of *Lemon.*

What is needed is not to repudiate *Lemon,* but to clarify it. The first two prongs of the *Lemon* test are about neutrality, and an arguable "advancement" of religion may be the most nearly neutral course if the alternative is an even greater "inhibition" of religion. The Court's results show that it believes this with something close to unanimity. It would reduce the flow of wasted litigation if the Court would amend the canonical formulation of *Lemon* to say so.

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Nathan Lewin

The *Kiryas Joel* decision proved once more that a majority of the justices of the Supreme Court—like most judges of lower courts in the United States—are either hostile to religion or do not understand what religious observance is all about.

First the group that was nakedly hostile. It included—much to my surprise—the Court's newest member, Justice Ginsburg. During the oral argument, she had sounded receptive to the plight of the Satmar Hasidim, and I had listed her as a possible vote in favor of the New York law. Instead, she joined the separate concurring opinion written by Justice Stevens, which Justice Scalia's dissent rightly called "a manifesto of secularism" that "announces a positive hostility to religion."

Stevens' startling statement declares that New York's law went beyond constitutional bounds because it "affirmatively supports a religious sect's interest in segregating itself and preventing its children from associating with their neighbors." In his short concurrence, joined by the now retired Justice Blackmun (along with Ginsburg), Stevens said that Kiryas Joel's separate public school district was invalid because it "provided official support to cement the attachment of young adherents to a particular faith" and "unquestionably increased the likelihood that they would remain within the fold, faithful adherents of their parents' religious faith."

I had always thought that the law that allows parents to send their children to private religious schools rather than to neighborhood public schools was designed to increase the likelihood that a family's faith would be transmitted from one generation to the next. Indeed, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters,* a 1925 Supreme Court decision, went so far as to hold that there is a constitutional *right* to cement the attachment of one's children to one's faith. But Justices Ginsburg and Stevens have now endorsed the view

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that it is a social evil if my children follow the religious observances that my family has practiced for generations. And a legislature that facilitates this transmission of belief and increases the likelihood of success of this baleful effort crosses the constitutional barrier.

Justices O'Connor, Kennedy, and Souter—the Court's centrist bloc—are not as openly hostile to religion. But their views display gross insensitivity to the difficulties of religious observance. Souter characterized New York's law as "religious favoritism"—as if the New York legislature gratuitously bestowed a lottery jackpot on the state's Satmar Hasidim.

The New York law was "favoritism" for the religious in the same sense as a progressive income tax rate is "favoritism" for the poor and a law requiring wheelchair ramps is "favoritism" for the handicapped. Poverty and disability are "conditions" that society is presumably entitled (and may be obliged) to ameliorate. Souter and O'Connor (who also invalidated the Kiryas Joel law because it singled out the Satmar Hasidim "for favorable treatment") do not see religion as an individual lifelong condition, like poverty or disability. They view it as a temporary personal preference—a possession that one may choose to keep or discard. Hence Justice Souter can say with equanimity that the Kiryas Joel law was "an adjustment to the Satmar's religiously grounded preferences that our cases do not countenance."

This judicial astigmatism is not really new. It is the reason I lost a case in the Supreme Court almost a decade earlier. When the Connecticut legislature repealed its Sunday closing law, it included a provision that gave every employee in the state a seemingly absolute right to be excused from work on the day of the week "observed as his Sabbath." In a decision called *Estate of Thornton v. Caldor*, decided in June 1985, the Supreme Court held 8-to-1 that this provision was unconstitutional because it was an "unyielding weighing in favor of Sabbath observers over all other interests." The law, said then Chief Justice Burger (with only current Chief Justice Rehnquist dissenting), gave Sabbath observers "the valuable right to designate a particular weekly day off," so it had the unconstitutional effect of "impermissibly advanc[ing] a particular religious practice." The Court plainly thought of this as religious favoritism—just as Justices Souter and O'Connor viewed the Kiryas Joel law. Burger went so far as to say that the law discriminated against employees who were not religiously observant because they "must take a back seat to the Sabbath observer."

No one on the *Thornton* Court saw the incongruity of treating the Sabbath-observer—who is frequently shut out of employment altogether or denied a promotion because of his or her unavailability one day a week—as a favored front-seat passenger. Have the rich been forced to "take a back seat" to the poor because the rich pay more than 38 percent of their income in federal taxes while some of the poor may not pay any income tax at all? And have those whose license plates show them to be handicapped drivers been accorded the "favoritism" of reserved close-in parking spaces while the rest of us must take long hikes from our parked cars?

The New York law singled out the Village of Kiryas Joel and gave it a public school district of its own because the Satmar Hasidic community had a unique condition that grew out of the religious observance of its members. Their learning-disabled children could not attend the public school program provided in the town of Monroe. Justices Souter and O'Connor (and possibly Justice Kennedy—although the reason he arrived at his conclusion is more murky) treated the religious conviction of the Satmar Hasidim as if it were a personal preference that entitled the Hasidim to no unique treatment. The law offended the Establishment Clause, they said, because it is impermissible to treat those who have a religious quirk differently from those who lack it—although secular preferences may be a basis for legislative distinction. Only those who are oblivious to religion can so cavalierly shunt it aside. The Framers of the First Amendment were not blind to religious values. This is why they categorically denied government the power to prohibit the "free exercise of religion."

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Michael W. McConnell

In 1974, the New York State legislature divided the Hasidic Jewish community of Williamsburg, in Brooklyn, between two state legislative districts, submerging their votes and eliminating Hasidic representatives from the legislature. This was explicitly for the purpose of creating additional districts with "substantial nonwhite majorities." The Hasidim challenged the racial gerrymander in court, but the Supreme Court rejected their plea. "The Constitution does not prevent a state," the Court explained, "from deliberately creating or preserving black majorities in particular districts." The Court brushed aside the Hasidim's own distinctive claim as a minority group, treating them as generic "white" voters, adequately represented, as "whites," in the legislature as a whole (*United Jewish Organizations v. Carey* [1977]).

In 1989, the New York legislature divided an Orange County school district into two parts, creating a district for the Village of Kiryas Joel, a municipality made up almost entirely of members of the Satmar Hasidic Jewish sect. The purpose was to enable the handicapped children of Kiryas Joel to

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obtain special educational services (to which they are entitled under state and federal law) at a public school within their own community, without having to send them to a more distant school where the other kids made fun of them for their Yiddish language, odd clothes and hairstyle, and peculiar customs. Public school officials from elsewhere in the state challenged the creation of the Kiryas Joel school district in court, and the Supreme Court again ruled against the Hasidim, declaring that it is unconstitutional for a legislature to create a political jurisdiction along lines defined by religion.

It is the old story of the double standard. It is okay to draw political boundaries for the benefit of racial minorities, but not of religious minorities. When the legislature deliberately chops up a district dominated by a religious minority, there is no problem: the Hasidim are just "white." But when it draws boundaries in their favor, the Hasidim become a distinct and dangerous group, and Justice Stevens—who happily joined in carving out districts more than 70 percent black—issues stern warnings against "segregation" along religious lines, which might, he says, "provide official support to cement the attachment of young adherents to a particular faith."

Ironically, the Kiryas Joel school district was created in the interest of accommodation and toleration—almost the opposite of the spirit of "Establishment" with which it was labeled. Two decades ago, about 8,000 members of the Satmar sect (most of whose members perished in the Holocaust) moved to a then-uninhabited part of Orange County, New York, and formed the Village of Kiryas Joel. Like most Orthodox Jews, the people of Kiryas Joel educate their children in religious schools, or yeshivas, while paying property taxes to support the secular schools used by the majority of their fellow citizens.

Under both state and federal law, all handicapped children—whether they go to public or to private school—are entitled to educational assistance appropriate to their special needs. For years, this assistance was provided by public school employees on the premises of the religious schools in Kiryas Joel. In 1985, however, the Supreme Court held that it is unconstitutional to provide the services in this way.

The Satmar handicapped children were then forced to travel to the public school in an adjoining community, run by the Monroe-Woodbury School District. Predictably, this was a disaster. The children, many of them already suffering from emotional disturbance and insecurity, experienced "panic, fear, and trauma," and all but one of the Satmar parents removed their children from this unsatisfactory placement.

The Satmar parents requested the school district to provide special education at a "neutral site" in the Village, as would have been permitted under the law; but the district refused. The parents sought relief in state court, but the court held that the district has discretion to decide how and where to provide the special education.

So the Satmar community turned to the legislature for help. Under the New York Constitution, the legislature could not tell the Monroe-Woodbury School District how to exercise its educational functions. But it could determine the boundaries of the district. And so the legislature voted to carve out a new school district coterminous with the boundaries of the Village of Kiryas Joel. This enabled the people of Kiryas Joel to establish a public school in the Village that would provide appropriate education for their handicapped children.

It seemed the perfect solution to a contentious problem. No individual's interests or rights were hurt. Even the Monroe-Woodbury School District was pleased, for it was freed of responsibility to deal with people whose customs it did not understand and who seemed obstreperous and difficult.

Why, then, did the Supreme Court hold it unconstitutional? It gave three reasons, none of them very persuasive.

First, the Court said this district violates the First Amendment "by delegating the State's discretionary authority over public schools to a group defined by its character as a religious community." But this cannot be right. In the same opinion, the Court stated that there is no constitutional problem with the existence of the Village of Kiryas Joel, which is "defined by" the same boundaries and which exercises far more discretionary governmental authority than the school district does. And as the Court admits, there are scores of other self-governing communities around the country no less "defined" by their religious character. If people have the freedom to move freely, establish communities, and govern themselves, there will be governmental units where the electorate is almost entirely of a particular religion. This is not Establishment. This is religious pluralism.

But the Court explained that the problem is not that the electorate making up the Kiryas Joel school district is all of one religion. The problem is that the legislature created this all-Satmar district deliberately. But again this cannot be right. The Court admitted that the legislative purpose of accommodating the needs of a religious minority is legitimate, even laudable. But if the purpose is legitimate, and the effect is legitimate, what is the problem?

Perhaps the Court should hold, as Justice Thomas urged in another case this term, that the states may not draw political boundaries intentionally on the basis of race, ethnicity, *or* religion. But it seems odd that the Voting Rights Act encourages the creation of districts dominated by one kind of minority while the First Amendment forbids creation of districts dominated by a different kind of minority.

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The Court's second answer is less mysterious but more troubling. The problem is that the legislature may have exercised favoritism toward the Satmar Hasidim. The Court lacked "assurance that the next similarly situated group seeking a school district of its own will receive one."

This portion of the opinion has the virtue of appealing to a genuine constitutional principle: that of equal treatment of all religious groups. But the application is illogical. Because the circumstances of the Satmar Hasidim are unique, no other group has presented an analogous problem. Surely the better course—as Justice Kennedy insisted in his concurrence—is to wait until the legislature *fails* to treat another group in a comparable way before striking down this law. If the Court is serious about this line of reasoning, then any "case-specific" accommodation to the needs of a particular religious minority is unconstitutional. That has never been the law.

The third reason for striking down the law in *Kiryas Joel* is the most distressing. According to three of the justices—Stevens, Blackmun, and Ginsburg—New York behaved unconstitutionally when it affirmatively "support[ed] a religious sect's interest in segregating itself and preventing its children from associating with their neighbors." This is an attack on a precious aspect of religious freedom for religious minorities. For many members of minority religions, to be able to assimilate into the wider culture is a great blessing. But for others—such as the Amish or the Satmar Hasidim—assimilation would destroy their religious way of life. It is difficult to bring up a child as a Satmar Hasid when the state insists upon educating all children in schools dominated by the majority culture.

Justice Scalia rightly said that the *Kiryas Joel* decision "turn[s] the Establishment Clause into a repealer of our nation's tradition of religious toleration." The Hasidim may seem a small and exotic group. But they represent the many millions of Americans whose lives are oriented around their religion, and who do not wish to be caught up—or have their children caught up—in the profane melting pot of mainstream America. The Supreme Court's lack of sympathy for this group—indeed, its utter incomprehension of this group—is symptomatic of the failure of our governing elites to take religion seriously.

Admittedly, there are glimmers of hope in the various opinions. Justice O'Connor openly called for reconsideration of Supreme Court precedents that seem to require "hostility to religion, religious ideas, religious people, or religious schools." And even the majority endorsed the important principle that "the Constitution allows the state to accommodate religious needs by alleviating special burdens." These are hopeful signs.

In practice, however, the Supreme Court finds every excuse to strike down state action that accommodates the free exercise of religion or that includes religious activities in the benefits of public programs. While it no longer mouths the rhetoric of "strict separation" or follows the *Lemon* test, which is the source of so much confusion and mischief in this area, the Court declines every invitation to repudiate *Lemon* or to replace it with an interpretation of Establishment more consistent with principles of religious free exercise.

And so the Hasidim are once again at the mercy of an unfriendly majority, and the nation remains mired in a First Amendment jurisprudence that is suspicious and uncongenial toward religion. For a decade the Court has made noises about doctrinal change. But after *Kiryas Joel* it is as distant as ever.

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Review Essay

Gay Marriage: Reimagining Church History

Robin Darling Young

SAME-SEX UNIONS IN PREMODERN EUROPE. By JOHN BOSWELL. *Villard Books. 412 pp. $25.*

Ancient in origin, same-sex unions blessed in the Church occur quietly to this day. So says John Boswell, Professor of Medieval History at Yale University and the author of this new and lavishly publicized book. It may surprise readers of this journal to learn that he is probably right—depending on what the ceremony means.

This is a subject about which I have the good fortune to speak not merely as a scholar or an observer, but as a participant. Nine years ago I was joined in devout sisterhood to another woman, apparently in just such a ceremony as Boswell claims to elucidate in his book. The ceremony took place during a journey to some of the Syrian Christian communities of Turkey and the Middle East, and the other member of this same-sex union was my colleague Professor Susan Ashbrook Harvey of Brown University. During the course of our travels we paid a visit to St. Mark's Monastery in Jerusalem, the residence of the Syrian Orthodox archbishop. There our host, Archbishop Dionysius Behnam Jajaweh, remarked that since we had survived the rigors of Syria and Eastern Turkey in amicable good humor, we two women must be good friends indeed. Would we like to be joined as sisters the next morning after the bishop's Sunday liturgy in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre? Intrigued, we agreed, and on a Sunday in late June of 1985, we followed the bishop and a monk through the Old City to a side chapel in the Holy Sepulchre where, according to the Syrian Orthodox, lies the actual tomb of Jesus. After the liturgy, the bishop had us join our right hands together and he wrapped them in a portion of his garment. He pronounced a series of prayers over us, told us that we were united as sisters, and admonished us not to quarrel. Ours was a sisterhood stronger than blood, confirmed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he said, and since it was a spiritual union, it would last beyond the grave.

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Our friendship has indeed endured and flourished beyond the accidental association of two scholars sharing an interest in the Syriac-speaking Christianity of late antiquity. The blessing of the Syrian Orthodox Church was a precious instance of our participation in the life of an ancient and noble Christian tradition. Although neither of us took the trouble to investigate the subject, each privately assumed that the ritual of that summer was some Christian descendant of an adoption ceremony used by the early church to solemnify a state—that of friendship—which comes highly recommended in the Christian tradition ("Henceforth I call you not servants . . . but I have called you friends." [John15:15]).

If this were all that Professor Boswell were claiming to have "discovered," neither I nor anyone else would be likely to dispute his findings. It seems reasonable to assume that ceremonies like the one Susan Ashbrook Harvey and I went through continue to take place in those Eastern churches that preserve the rite of adoption (*adelphopoiēsis*) for friends. In fact, scholars of the liturgy have known for years of these rituals.

But any such modest claim is not what Boswell has in mind. He claims that the "brother/sister-making" rituals found in manuscripts and certain published works are ancient ceremonies whose cryptic (or, in current argot, "encoded") purpose has been to give ecclesiastical blessing to homosexual or lesbian relationships, thus making them actual nuptial ceremonies. This startling claim is certainly far from the reality of the ceremony in which we participated nine years ago. Is it perhaps just as far from the real meaning of such ceremonies in the distant past? According to his publisher, Boswell "irrefutably demonstrates that same-sex relationships have been sanctioned and even idealized in Western societies for over two thousand years." He has also "restored" a rite that could be used in contemporary homosexual marriages, should they become legal.

The texts on which he leans for his assertions will be examined below. But to begin with, I will say flatly that neither Boswell's reconstruction of them nor his method of argumentation can possibly support the interpretation he proposes. First, it is highly

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implausible that homosexual unions either in antiquity or in the Middle Ages would have been blessed by a religion that promoted ascetic devotion to the kingdom of God rather than that condition which contemporary Americans understand as the healthy expression of erotic drives. In that sense the book is, as Boswell himself admits, counterintuitive in its very premise. Furthermore, early Byzantine law codes contain extremely harsh punishments for homosexual intercourse.

But even more disturbing than its implausible assumption is the book's promotion of a contemporary cause, i.e., homosexual marriage, through the invention of precedent. Even the most cursory examination of Boswell's documentation exposes the way he has struggled to force a group of documents to conform to his conclusions. Despite its facade of scholarship, the book is studded with unwarranted a priori assumptions, with arguments from silence, and with dubious, or in some cases outrageously false, translations of critical terms. And Boswell's insouciance about historical accuracy would be unacceptable in an undergraduate paper. It will, for instance, come as news to Orthodox patriarch and Byzantinist alike that "the Theodosian Code [439] had made the upper reaches of the Roman state a Roman Catholic theocracy"; and Severus of Antioch (d. 538) would be aghast, patrician Hellenophone that he was, to discover that he had composed his Homily on St. Sergius in Syriac.

Boswell's approach to the historian's craft has hallowed antecedents in the pious partiality and distortion that marked the writing of modern church history from its beginnings in the sixteenth century. While Boswell clearly aspires to influence the current American debate about such issues as the nature of marriage and the rights of homosexuals, his tendentiousness in the use of evidence is depressingly old-fashioned. In fact, for all its topicality, its commercial sales appeal, and its political timing (hardly by chance was it released on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall protests), the book's methods fairly creak with age. To be sure, Boswell's documents are real, but he uses them in a way that would be quite familiar to church historians of the era of "confessional" church history, famously represented by the Magdeburg Centuries among the Reformers and Caesar Baronius among the Catholics. Those writers, responding to certain pressing ideological needs of their own day, created a history to serve the purpose of their employers, whether the patrons of the Evangelische Kirche or Roman prelates. Like them, Professor Boswell has set out to create a usable past.

For Christians, antiquity means the founding centuries of the Church, when apostolic teaching was preserved and elaborated and a body of thought assembled. Thus someone attempting to demonstrate, say, that believers' baptism is the only authentic Christian practice, or that women may now be ordained as priests, will seek to gain the sanction of antiquity for his position. Traditionalists, for whom it is imperative that Roman Catholic priests be unmarried and celibate, "prove," by invoking the evidence against itself, that early Christian priests who were married never in fact made love to their wives or sired children after their ordinations.

In the present superheated climate of ideological warfare it has been tempting to abandon the painstaking search for the true reconstruction of the past. Proponents of intellectual movements like cultural criticism or of political movements like multiculturalism have claimed flatly that there is no possibility, respectively, of securing a historical narrative of events as they happened *eigentlich*, or of arriving at a consensus view. If "texts" do not exist independently of their readers, no one true interpretation can be said to exist.

That is not Boswell's approach: he portrays his work as an investigation that by patient reconstruction and analysis restores the record of gay couples of the past whose existence was heretofore hidden by the prudery of an oppressive church and culture. It is understandable that groups that see themselves as oppressed should want to recover their authentic history. But to create a false history, as Boswell has done in this book (despite its elaborate scholarly apparatus), is to undermine the very cause the work hopes to advance.

II

According to Boswell, the "Christian ceremony of same-sex union functioned in the past as a 'gay marriage ceremony.'" Until the fourteenth century, when, he alleges, Christian societies developed an "obsessive" fear of homosexuality and condemned it as the most horrible of sins, the Church employed the rite of *adelphopoiēsis* as a way of sacramentally instituting a "permanent romantic commitment" between homosexual lovers. The documents that allegedly attest to this practice go under the title which in English means "the making of brothers" (or "sisters," since in the Greek compound, the word *adelpho-* can signify either noun). The language employed in these texts does not suggest any kind of sexual connection between the two parties united in this particular bond. How, then, does Boswell confirm their status as rites for "gay marriage"? By building a case for the existence of a hidden context, which is in turn made the interpretative key for determining the documents' meaning. A careful reading of each of the eight chapters with which Boswell builds his case reveals the fragile base on which the entire edifice stands. He obviously anticipated strong criticism: in September of 1993, even before the book was out, he challenged his readers on ABC's "Day One": "Let these people [i.e., his critics] show I read

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the Greek or Old Church Slavonic wrong." And in the June 2, 1994 issue of the *New Yorker*, he promised his interviewer that "They're going to lose any arguments they pick with me."

The question of Boswell's translation is a critical one: in the book's first chapter, titled "The Vocabulary of Love and Marriage," it is assumed that certain terms, the majority of them Greek, are not to be translated according to the norms of classical philology. Thus, for example, as has been pointed out, though the text in no way supports his doing so, Boswell construes *adelphos*, "brother," to mean "homosexual lover," by this means supporting the existence of homosexual marriage in antiquity. Here we find disingenuousness opening the door to ingenuity: after examining the semantics of certain Greek and Latin terms for love (*eraō, agapaō*, and *phileō*) and marriage (*gamos, nubere*, etc.) and demonstrating that there is often an overlap of meaning among them, Boswell adduces the contemporary use of the term "brother" among gay males to conclude that "the most significant problem in the whole catalogue of semantic slippage related to love and sexuality is the use of sibling designations for romantic partners, of either gender." Just as "to sleep with" can in modern usage be taken to mean sexual intercourse, so by (false) analogy *adelphos* and *adelphotes* (brotherhood) are taken to mean the state of sexual union. Boswell actually cites the term "brother," used to refer to fellow Christians in the early centuries of the Church, to bolster his case that the word was metaphorical and therefore likely to mean "lover"—when in the early Christian context it signifies simply belonging to Christ's family, one of the adopted sons of God.

By the end of the chapter Boswell has reached the point of claiming that earlier scholarly discussions of "brotherhood" rituals were meant "to disguise the nature of the same-sex union" and that his (mis)translations are necessary to rescue the term from its prudish application to mere brotherhood, whether of blood kinship or, as in the Church, spiritual kinship. Of one such union of brotherhood he writes, "[I]ts nature has long been obscured both by artful mistranslation and a general unwillingness to recognize something as ostensibly improbable as a same-sex union."

Having compromised the plain meanings of words, meanings supported by the majority of readings in the corpus of classical literature, Boswell next turns to the Greco-Roman world in order to establish the supposed context for the Christian rituals he will take up later. In two succeeding chapters he discusses, respectively, heterosexual matrimony in late antiquity and "same-sex unions" in the same period. It is necessary for his argument to establish that these were two roughly equivalent forms of human consortium, because in subsequent chapters he means to demonstrate that early Christianity absorbed such late-Roman customs. Along the way, he routinely characterizes marriage, which in the Roman Empire was always legally and explicitly heterosexual, as an impersonal union, and "primarily a property arrangement." Since, he implies, marriages between men and women were "business deals," not usually marked by affection or equality, homosexual unions, with their intense and intimate friendships, were humanly superior. A throwaway, and unsupported, line on page 65 asserts that "divorce was very common in heterosexual marriages at Rome, as well as nonmarital sexuality, at least for the male. . . . " The reader is encouraged to think that late Roman citizens treated marriage casually and cynically; but the texts of late antiquity suggest just the opposite. Admittedly a practical arrangement, marriage varied in its details, but also included the aims of mutual affection and successful childrearing.

Boswell's short chapter on marriage can hardly be taken seriously as a scholarly consideration of an exceedingly complex subject. During the last fifteen years, the entire subject of marriage and the family in late antiquity has come under intense scrutiny, and Boswell devotes little effort to presenting the conclusions of that research, mainly because he is eager to prove the equal standing of legal homosexual unions that supposedly stood beside marriage. In his discussion, he provides little material not already presented in his *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980), a popular but intensely criticized monograph which similarly attempted to show that the early Church tolerated a preexisting Roman custom of homosexuality.

Because he therefore needs to establish that Roman law permitted homosexual unions, Boswell must interpret all uses of the word "brother" in adoption ceremonies as a sign of homosexuality, and must force every reference to male friendship to connote homosexual coupledom in the modern sense. For example, discussing a passage from Xenophon, he translates a passage which in Greek reads *anēr kai pais suzugentes homilousin*, "man and boy converse/consort, being bound together" (cf. Greek-English Lexicon, ed. Liddell and Scott, col. 1669) "as in Boeotia, man and boy live together, like married people." In a footnote to this passage, he does grant that "like married people" is not literally expressed here—but fails to inform the nonspecialist reader that there is no mention of marriage in the passage at all!

The remainder of the chapter discusses three types of "formal unions" between men. None, in fact, is evidence of a legal, contractual "marriage" between members of the same sex. The first is a fictionalized description of a homosexual abduction; the second describes a ritual akin to blood-brotherhood; and the third is clearly a form of legal adoption between males. Only the third can be representative of any common procedure in the late Empire, and none is

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comparable to the institution of marriage. Yet by selective quotation Boswell gives the impression that homosexual marriage was acceptable and legal in the world into which Christianity came, and dismisses those scholars who accepted the plain sense of fraternal adoption as having been blinded by their homophobia.

The final five chapters of the book contain Boswell's analysis of the Christian history of homosexual marriage. These chapters contain frequent gaffes, faulty translations, and specious arguments, and a sizeable essay would be required to correct them all. Boswell's general argument is that Christianity uncritically absorbed late-Roman mores with regard to sex and marriage. Thus he casually transfers the misleading portrait he has drawn of the late-ancient pagan world to the social and cultural life created as Christianity began to dominate the Mediterranean. In doing so, he misreads the intensely religious devotion which insisted that those wishing to become Christians must, in both outlook and behavior, choose between "the way of life and the way of death" (*Didache,* 1-6 [ca.100]). Here is Boswell's gloss on Christianity's sexual morality: "[Early Christian insistence on sexuality's procreative purpose] probably drew its heightened intensity among Christian peoples from a fervent, almost obsessive Christian emphasis on the afterlife as the primary focus and measure of all earthly value and action—a preoccupation that may now seem counterintuitive even to Christians, living in more worldly and materialistic frames of reference."

Salvation through faith in Christ, not "afterlife," was the moving force behind conversion to Christianity—at least before it was made the state religion. Because such salvation entailed a thorough reinterpretation of the visible and invisible world, early Christian authors put the whole of their inherited pagan culture under anxious scrutiny. Despite the fact that religious paganism survived well past the period of early Christianity, it is highly questionable to assume, with Boswell, that pre-Christian sexual practices could be easily transferred into Christian ritual, when in fact they could not be and were not.

When he turns to a discussion of "the new religion," Boswell depends upon a number of unwarranted assumptions in order to promote his view that the practice of same-sex unions was carried over into early Christianity. First, he creates a caricature of the early Christian enthusiasm for the solitary, ascetic life in imitation of Christ. Second, he distorts the scriptural and patristic teachings on marriage and its purpose—strict in part because they derived from Judaism—into a purported ambivalence about the worth of marriage. Third, by selective quotation he converts certain paired saints, most notably Sergius and Bacchus, into homosexual couples venerated by Christians for that reason.

Two egregious errors occur on pp. 110-111. In the first, Boswell wishes to show that matrimony was downgraded by early Christians. He repeats the by-now conventional, but unproven, explanation of the women's monastic movement by declaring that celibacy provided Christian women "an escape from the confinements of ordinary social obligations, and . . . a route to social power and prestige through the Church." The patristic attitude toward marriage he summarizes by libeling Augustine: "St. Augustine, whose views of sexuality were to become normative in the Western church, lived with a concubine for fifteen years, had a son by her, and then dismissed her summarily when he had the opportunity to satisfy his ambition by marrying an heiress."

Augustine records in the *Confessions* that, although he did accede to his mother's wish that he pursue an ambitious marriage, "this was a blow which crushed my heart to bleeding, for I loved her dearly." Augustine, in other words, was torn between conflicting desires, but he was not unfeeling or casual about his quasi-marriage. Nor are his views entirely representative of early Christian views of marriage.

Further, in a discussion of marriage in the early Christian period, Boswell asserts that "a thousand years after its inception Christianity would begin to emphasize the biological family as the central unit of Christian society." Here he has perhaps been misled by the current scholarly interest in asceticism. Had he read the homilies of John Chrysostom or Augustine, the orations of Gregory Nazianzen or the *Life of Macrina* by Gregory of Nyssa (all from the early centuries of the Fathers), he would have found a considerable emphasis on what we nowadays call the "nuclear" family as the primary way of life for Christians, despite the attractions of an undistractedly religious life.

Boswell is in any case chiefly interested in supposed homosexual unions, and he discusses Christian marriage mainly in order to contrast it with same-sex unions entered into solely for the sake of love. Since the historical evidence for such unions is almost nil, he is led to outrageous acts of eisegesis. His reading into the text what is not there begins with the "beloved disciple," a case argued unsuccessfully in his previous book: "Certainly the most controversial same-sex couple in the Christian tradition comprised Jesus and John. . . ." He then moves to Perpetua and Felicitas, North African martyrs of ca. 200: "The paired femaleness of the two martyrs seems to be what appealed most to Christians. . . ." SS. Polyeuctos and Nearchos (ca. 250) died together. Their biographer, Boswell claims, describes them as "brothers, not by birth, but by affection." The Greek text, however, reads *kata proairesin*, "by choice." Boswell goes on to quote at length from the *acta* of the two martyrs, invoking the principle of mistranslation elaborated in Chapter One to translate the *ametro philia* enjoyed by Nearchos and Polyeuctos as

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"boundless love," rather than, as is correct, "limitless friendship," thus injecting an erotic charge where the text contained none. He concludes:

> Although the point of the story was manifestly to appeal to Christians as a reminder of those who embraced martyrdom as Christians in the face of Roman persecution, it may have evoked particular enjoyment from those sensitive to romantic relationships (or special friendships) with a party of the same gender, particularly since both men were soldiers, and there was a widespread and ancient Hellenistic connection between homoeroticism and the military.

Many Christians may not have gotten the point, Boswell adds, but those "particularly susceptible to such feelings [the erotic] may have interpreted them more erotically." This is always possible, of course; but it proves nothing.

The Life of Sergius and Bacchus, which records the deaths of two soldier-martyrs in the reign of Maximian, is given similar treatment, based on a similar mistranslation. In the story, Bacchus dies first, and appears in a vision to exhort Sergius to preserve his Christian faith in the face of certain martyrdom the next day. Boswell asserts that "Bacchus' promise that if Serge followed the Lord he would get as his reward not the beatific vision, not the joy of paradise, not even the crown of martyrdom, but Bacchus himself, was remarkable by the standards of the early church, privileging human affection in a way unparalleled during the first thousand years of Christianity."

To arrive at this conclusion requires that Boswell read *Sun soi gar apokeitai moi ho tēs dikaiosynēs stephanos* as "For the crown of justice for me is to be with you." But that is not how it reads; the Latin version more correctly translates the Greek as *Tecum enim mihi reposita est justitia et corona*: "For with you is laid up for me the crown of righteousness" (in the Latin, "righteousness and crown") [cf. 2 Timothy 4:8]. In other words, the two will together gain the crown—not primarily one another's person, as Boswell wishes.

The final three chapters of *Same-Sex Unions* build on Boswell's interpretation of early Christian texts to discover what the ceremonies he has uncovered signify. He concludes that wherever the term "brother" is found, an erotic meaning is justified. By equating the terms "brother" with "lover" and "friendship" with (erotic) "love" and linking them to earlier texts, Boswell is able to read the few medieval Western and Byzantine references outside the rituals reproduced here to attest to an ancient tradition of homosexual marriage that continued unabated from Roman antiquity through the Byzantine and, in isolated instances, into modernity.

Boswell raises three possible alternative interpretations of the ceremonies, but only in order to dismiss them. In his view, they do not establish a "spiritual fraternity," nor are they blood-brotherhood rites, nor are they fraternal adoption ceremonies. Boswell then tries to establish a parallel between "same-sex and heterosexual ceremonies of union," and finally, by interpreting instances of the use of the term *adelphopoiēsis* as a homosexual marriage, he finds the "antecedents" for his rituals. The Emperor Basil I (867-886), founder of the Macedonian dynasty of Byzantium, and apparently a homosexual, then becomes a prima facie case for the commonness of same-sex unions, when in fact Basil's homosexuality was notable precisely because it was unusual.

Even so, Boswell's account of Basil's relationship with another man involves mistranslation. Before becoming emperor, Basil was made brother of one John, a native of Achaia, although he had at first resisted entering into a relationship with an underling. According to Boswell's translation of the historian Theophanes Continuator, Basil "honored [John] with the title *protospatarius* and granted him intimacy with him on account of their earlier shared life in ceremonial union." The word for "intimacy" here is *parrhesia*, meaning the freedom-of-speech, the boldness, enjoyed by an inferior before his superior. And "earlier . . . union" is more readily translated as "previous association in spiritual brotherhood," the Greek clause reading: *kai tēs pros auton parresias metedoke dia tēn phthasasan koinōnian tēs pneumatikes adelphotētos*. Contrary to Boswell, *koinonia* rarely means sexual intercourse, even though, in Boswell's words, "Basil was thus what modern Americans would call a 'hunk.'" It is hard to see, by the way, how Figure 13, a reproduction of a manuscript illumination of this episode in Theophanes, bears out either Boswell's interpretation of this adoption ceremony as a "liturgical union" or his estimation of Basil's physical allure.

A final chapter argues that "same-sex unions" have continued to be practiced, even though the prejudices of modern scholars have caused them to be misinterpreted as non-homosexual.

At the end of this long and tortured attempt at historical reconstruction lie the celebrated documents themselves. Two appendices contain translations and documents that allegedly attest to same-sex union. Oddly, these sections contain somewhat different kinds of material. The first contains a hymn to Sergius and Bacchus, a nuptial office from the Gelasian sacramentary, a brotherhood contract between Louis the Eleventh of France and the Duke of Bourgogne, a "heterosexual ceremony" of the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*, and twelve *adelphopoiēsis* rituals, of which three are in Slavonic and nine in Greek. The presence of canonical marriage rites alongside supposed gay marriage rites is undoubtedly meant to suggest their equivalency.

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As for the texts printed in Greek (the Slavonic texts are not presented in the volume), only a few of these texts have not been published before, and an examination of the "Manuscripts of Same-Sex Union" shows that of the sixty-two manuscripts consulted, only eleven have not been previously published or described. Scholars have known of these prayers and services and have steadily published them over the course of the century. Boswell, then, did not discover them; he only put them to use for his purposes.

Nothing makes this plainer than the claim advanced for the entries under *Akolouthia eis adelphopoiēsin* in MS. Grottaferrata Gamma Beta Two. Boswell refers, as if they belonged to the same ritual, to a text called "another prayer for the making of a brother" and the "Ecclesiastical Canon of Marriage of the Patriarch Methodius." Footnote 80 astonishingly claims that a line appearing in the manuscript between the first and second items cannot signify a division between types of text, when the Greek makes perfectly clear from the final verb—*(apoluetai)* "they are dismissed" after "making a profound bow" (*proskynousi,* not necessarily "kissing," as Boswell translates) to the Gospel, the priest, and each other — that the *Kanōn* of marriage is not a part of the adoption ceremony. This is most inconvenient for Boswell's case, as even he later concedes.

All in all, then, this book does not begin to accomplish what it set out to do. (The reviews, after the early burst of hopeful publicity, have been notably skeptical—even from sources one would expect to be favorable.) Indeed, the author's painfully strained effort to recruit Christian history in support of the homosexual cause that he favors is not only a failure, but an embarrassing one. FT

Not Even Solomon

You fold your things, your room,
into improvised cases
while the father who brought you to this place
and has returned again, bleary eyed,
paces the corners, making suggestions,
waiting gracelessly to take you back
to the place he calls your home.

You, little daughter fully-grown,
undaunted by your chaperone and
wearily resigned to your departure,
turn from your sweatshirt creasing
and toss a smile at my eyes.
I drop it (fumbling coyly
lest I appear too eager to usurp
the province of some well-chosen son)
and let it fall among the stacks
of books and backs of banners
stolen from a University streetlamp.

"Maybe, if I'm better, I'll be back in spring."
Your maybe is the hardest thing
unforeseen and shattering
the certainties of the wordless hopes
I had nurtured in our small distance.
"Yes. Yes, perhaps."
But, still, you are leaving.

Douglas C. Anderson

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Books In Review

Judging Rightly

Essays in Understanding. By Hannah Arendt. Edited by Jerome Kohn. *Harcourt Brace. 414 pp. $39.95.*

Reviewed by **Jean Bethke Elshtain**

Books about Hannah Arendt have been proliferating at a brisk pace. Now there is a new book by Arendt herself, a collection of pieces that span the tumultuous twenty-five year period from 1930 to the mid-fifties. It does boggle the mind. Nazism, fascism, Stalinism, the beginning of the Cold War, the atom bomb, crises of belief and unbelief among Christians and Communists and liberal democrats alike. Arendt had an opinion about nearly everything of political importance, and she formed a judgment—for her the most important of all political faculties is that of judging—on all the issues and figures and philosophic problems that engaged and vexed her. And her judgments were unfailingly issued in a decisive manner; indeed, for some she was altogether too Olympian. My hunch is that one reason her stock has risen in the years since her death in 1974 is precisely because she offers such a sharp contrast to the sheer mushiness that often passes for political thinking at present.

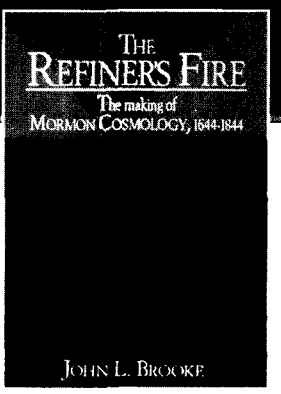
For Arendt, politics is not about "feeling your pain." It is about understanding what of the pain people feel has to do with politics and about what politics can do to resolve our common dilemmas. This means tending to the limits of what politics can do as well. "Feelings" rapidly become subjectivist and limitless. Understanding, by contrast, is concrete and limited, framed by the perils and possibilities of a specific moment in time and space. Understanding can be challenged and is compelled to respond to an alternative argument or interpretation. "Feelings" are not open to critical challenge in the same way. To base politics on feelings or empathy is, for Arendt, a disaster, drawing politics in on projects that politics, by definition, is ill-equipped to handle. In making her judgments she sometimes bruised the feelings of others. "I am not particularly agreeable," Arendt says of herself in an interview included in this collection, "nor am I very polite; I say what I think."

What, then, on the basis of this collection did she think? Wide-ranging and somewhat uneven, as any decent anthology is bound to be, there is much food for thought—from appetizers to dessert—here gathered. First and foremost, of course, is Arendt's defense of politics itself against its detractors. These detractors run the gamut from totalitarians to systematic philosophers to social science methodologists. The totalitarian must destroy politics and in its place substitute terror. Totalitarians traffic in ideology, and ideology "lends an absolute authority" to a social situation: the ideologist believes himself to be in the grip of a compulsion—an iron hand of necessity—of such force that he is himself helpless against it. He is but a tool in the hands of destiny. "It has been characteristic of our history-conscious century that its worst crimes have been committed in the name of some kind of necessity or in the name—and this amounts to the same thing—of the 'wave of the future,'" Arendt writes. Those who give themselves over to an ideology go on automatic pilot as the corpses mount. "Tyranny," she says, "is the hubristic attempt to be like God, invested with power individually, in complete solitude." Others then become merely grist for one's mill. "It is against these makers of history that a free society has to defend itself, regardless of the vision they harbor," she insists, and this goes for idealistic Communists as well as cynical fascists.

Arendt is very clear that terror is not simply a "tool" of the totalitarian but is the very essence of his system. Thus, the "concentration

Jean Bethke Elshtain *is author of* Democracy on Trial, *her 1993 Massey Lectures for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, forthcoming from Basic Books.*

Creating An American Religion



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camps are the laboratories in the experiment of total domination, for human nature being what it is, this goal can be achieved only under extreme circumstances of a human-made hell." Total domination is achieved only when that dreadful point is reached at which the human person—"who is always a specific mixture of spontaneity and being conditioned"—has been transformed into an altogether conditioned entity. What the totalitarian strives to achieve is a reduced human being, one who is a "bundle of reliable reactions."

That, oddly enough, is what social science of a certain sort yearns for too. Arendt does not, to be sure, collapse terror and social science into one another, but surely practitioners of social science as a *Wertfrei* enterprise must squirm at her insistence that the drive to eliminate "every trace of spontaneity" is shared by all control freaks of the twentieth century. It is not surprising, therefore, that when American political scientists hit upon the notion that the study of politics, in order to be a science, had to predict what people would do, they called their project the "behaviorist revolution." What they would measure, quantify, and model was human "behavior." Human action falls outside the reach of such methodology. If one redefines what humans do as *behavior*, one has trimmed the human person down to the appropriate size for the "scientific" study of politics. Arendt saw this as the diminished and diminishing enterprise that it was.

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WHAT, then, of philosophy? One problem with philosophy's relation to politics is that the philosopher is often driven to conclusions by his own internally consistent system. Here again, Arendt presses one of those analogies that distressed so many. Hitler, she claims, was a man of logic if one defines logic "as the capability to press on to conclusions with a total disregard for all reality and all experience. . . ." Philosophy is similarly suspect to the political thinker, in part because of its drive to systematize, to reach inevitable and exhaustive conclusions. This helps one to understand why Arendt avoided calling herself a political philosopher. There is, for her, "a vital tension between philosophy and politics." In fact, most "political philosophies have their origin in the philosopher's negative and sometimes even hostile attitude toward the *polis* and the whole realm of human affairs."

When philosophers engage the political realm they tend to demand of it what it cannot offer—not, at least, without violent wrenchings—and even then the "solution" to the uncertainty and instability of politics—namely, permanence, an unflappable calm, a smoothly managed, mechanically humming affair—is bound to be short-lived. But the concept of freedom, a concept that is not for Arendt primarily an individual, but rather a political, good, "is inconceivable outside of plurality, and this plurality includes not only different ways but different principles of life and thought. A universal society can only signify a threat to freedom." The philosopher's quest for the universal overshoots the mark and, in lesser hands, breeds only the quietude of tyrannical suppression of human plurality, a peace of the sort St. Augustine rebuked in his mocking riposte that, in the matter of the Pax Romana, "Peace and war had a contest in cruelty and peace won the prize."

WHAT DOES Arendt offer in place of the horrible realities of twentieth century politics, the hubris of philosophy, and the witlessness of social science pretense? Her insistence that one cannot leap-frog over the concrete existence of the individual. In a wonderful discussion of Kierkegaard, she gives his polemic against Hegel high marks, for in "Kierkegaard's view, philosophy is so caught up in its own systematics that it forgets and loses sight of the actual self of the philosophizing subject: it never touches the 'individual' in his concrete 'existence.' " Kierkegaard's ironic rebuff of Hegel (in his very funny *Prefaces*) is a rejoinder to any and every philosophical system that "interprets history as a logically comprehensible sequence of events and a process that follows an inevitable course." For Arendt, the beginning of political wisdom lies in an unwavering commitment to the individual and to a community of individuals—a plurality, not a mass.

From that commitment, Arendt draws another: a determination to resist notions of collective guilt or exoneration in favor of the far greater task of assessing responsibility. The context in which she writes about this is the terrible one of coming to grips with what happened in Nazi Germany. Arendt's fear was that the victorious Allies would make "no distinction as to responsibility" and that German anti-fascists "will suffer from defeat equally with German fascists. . . ." Although that particular moment has passed, the issue is one that will not soon go

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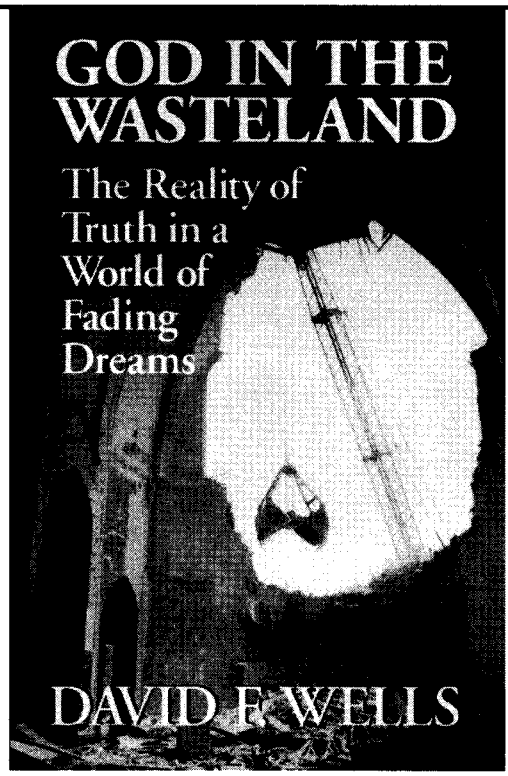
away. Arendt repudiates any notion of racial taint or historic guilt. Were she alive she would warn us sternly about the temptations and dangers of current appeals to racial or ethnic identity—to "black rage" or "white guilt" and the like. These antipolitical quests must come to grief of one sort or another.

Arendt cautions as well against the seductive dangers inherent in all *political* appeals to global ends. There are perverse forms of internationalism—those that find loyalty to finite and limited political bodies contemptible. She never engages in the idolatry of the particular political identity of the citizen of one state by contrast to some other. By the same token, however, she refuses to take refuge in the notion that perpetual peace will be possible only when all particular loyalties are vanquished and we have become "citizens" of a world society. This ersatz universal citizenship is as dubious as are notions of collective guilt or innocence, operating as it does at a level far removed from the concrete tasks of daily life and political responsibility respectful of our individuality and our plurality.

Her discussion of these matters is driven in part by her concern with anti-Semitism. The anti-Semite finds in the historic irreducibility of the Jewish people an obstacle to the achievement of a homogeneous national identity or, for the especially ambitious, a transnational world order. The Jew for the anti-Semite embodies the scandal of particularity. Arendt certainly does not mean to object to political or religious values that transcend national boundaries (democracy, Christianity) but she takes strong exception to any and all attempts to implement a project of globalization as a political end or ideological quest.

Finally, Arendt tellingly warns against complacent endorsements of the democratic enterprise that may not prove robust enough to sustain it over time. Her target here is the American pragmatist John Dewey. In a prescient piece written in 1946, Arendt goes to the heart of the problem with Dewey's pragmatism: "What makes it so difficult to review this philosophy is that it is equally hard to agree or to disagree with it." She finds Dewey out of touch with reality, smug in his endorsement of a teleology of progress, certain that the past with its "slaves and serfs" was evil by contrast to the sunny prospects of the present. Dewey frustrates her—she finds that his arguments vaporize as soon as she begins to press them. Arendt would be even less pleased with the thinner version of Dewey compressed into the work of Richard Rorty. Rorty, too, is a happy apostle of progress and it is the seduction of progress—its tendency to lull our judging faculty to sleep—that most worries Arendt



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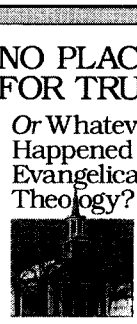

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about the American democratic experiment. She cites approvingly—and it is worth concluding here—Walter Benjamin's dark vision: "The angel of history . . . turns his face to the past. Where we see a chain of events, he sees a single catastrophe which unremittingly piles ruins on ruins and hurls them at his feet. He wishes he could stay—to awaken the dead and to join together the fragments. But a wind blows from Paradise, gets caught in his wings and is so strong that the angel cannot close them. This wind drives him irresistibly into the future to which he turns his back, while the pile of ruins before him towers to the skies. What we call progress is this wind."

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William James: Then and Now

SUBMITTING TO FREEDOM: THE RELIGIOUS VISION OF WILLIAM JAMES. By BENNETT RAMSEY. *Oxford University Press. 208 pp. $24.95.*

Reviewed by **Peter Ochs**

PRAGMATISM is Western philosophy that seeks to speak once again to the practical needs of everyday life, including religious life. In this book, Bennett Ramsey reads the pragmatic philosophy of William James both in the way it may have spoken to the religious needs of James' society and in the way it speaks to the religious needs of ours.

Toward both ends, the most telling passage of the book comes in the middle, when Ramsey describes James' only public oration, on May 31, 1897, at the Boston Music Hall, on the occasion of the unveiling of a war memorial to Colonel Robert Shaw. Here was the incongruous event of James, the neurasthenic, "standing before the assembled gathering of soldiers and citizens, speaking about a colonel in a war from which James had been excused."

> Fortunately for James, there was something equally incongruous about Colonel Shaw. . . . James took as his theme . . . what amounted to the antiheroics of Shaw and his Fifty-fourth Regiment. He aimed his praise at the . . . statue's . . . being . . . "the first soldier's monument to be raised to a

PETER OCHS *is the Wallerstein Associate Professor and Program Director of Jewish Studies at Drew University. His most recent publication is* The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity *(Paulist Press).*

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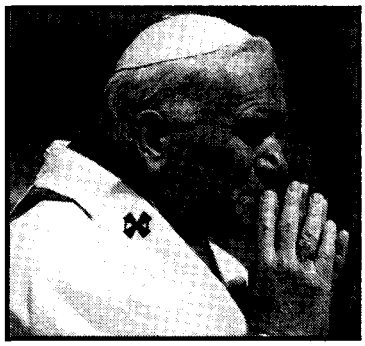

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> particular set of comparatively undistinguished men . . . [to a 'young colonel,' in a] regiment of black men ['outcasts,'] [in] its maiden battle—a battle, moreover, which was lost.'"

The virtue James proceeded to praise was not military prowess, but "common civic courage . . . : faithfulness to a cause [here, the fight against racism and slavery] . . . the willingness to suffer ridicule, abuse, and failure in the performance of one's tasks." These soldiers were, then, "saints of a religious faith, lonely followers of what James called 'our American religion,' namely, that 'a man requires no master to take care of him, and that common people can work out their own salvation well enough if left free to try.'" According to Ramsey,

> what James offered in his portrait of Shaw was a counter to the redescribed self that [he had] presented in *The Principles [of Psychology]*. . . . Whereas before James' emphasis had been on the self of assertion, filled with the chance at adventure and heroic action, now the reverse was stressed: loneliness, submission, and suffering for the sake of cause, risk, failure, and antiheroics.

This transformation in James' thought prefigures the transformation Ramsey would like to see in contemporary American religion.

Ramsey sets James' earlier writings—up to the completion of the *Principles* in 1890—in the context of America's post-Civil War cultural crisis. "Urbanization and industrialization; a scientific and technological revolution; an increasingly impersonal and bureaucratized social order"—all these conspired, he concludes with some degree of overgeneralization, to produce a single national condition: "the loss of stability and plasticity, of purpose, immediacy, and self-determination—all of this struck bottom against a disintegrating framework of religious meaning, a crumbling definition of the ultimate dimension of the self." James' early response to the crisis was to offer a psychology that "rewove" the self, in Ramsey's terms: a model of a self characterized by inner breaks and discontinuities, but also by the power to act by its own free choice and, through the habit-forming effect of repeated actions, to reweave its plural forms into complex continuities.

ATTEMPTING ONCE again to capture the character of an entire age, Ramsey suggests that the America of 1890-1910 seemed to adopt James' model of self-realization only too well. "The obstructed American will, steeped in disappointment . . .

DISCIPLES AND DEMOCRACY

Religious Conservatives and the Future of American Politics

Edited by MICHAEL CROMARTIE

The religious right, currently the subject of intense press attention, is here scrutinized by both insiders and outside observers. Journalists **Fred Barnes** (*The New Republic*), **Michael Barone** (*U.S. News & World Report*), and **E. J. Dionne** (*Washington Post*), activists **Ralph Reed** (Christian Coalition) and **Michael Farris**, and scholarly analysts **John Green**, **Allen Hertzke**, **Michael Horowitz**, **Richard Land**, and **George Weigel** examine the agenda of religious conservatives, their influence upon the 1992 election, and whether and how they can increase their political influence in the next four years. In a foreword, **Irving Kristol** calls religious conservatives "the very core of an emerging American conservatism." The volume, published jointly by the Ethics and Public Policy Center and Eerdmans, includes brief comments by eighteen other informed observers as well. **147 pages, paper, $12.99** ■ ISBN 0-8028-0847-6

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was suddenly explosive, caught up and carried forward by a national crusading impulse. . . . It was a time of historical romance, of the aggressive, imperial self." In religion, this meant a time of romantic, militant Christianity—on the one hand, an evangelical Christianity of global missions and, on the other, a spiritual Christianity turned inward to an invisible, timeless realm of Christian ideals. James' oration for Colonel Shaw indicated his own response to the cultural change: if this kind of self-realization was supposed to cure America's ills, then it was time for him to offer a new prescription.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, published in 1902, James presented his new prescription by way of a distinction between the religiously "healthy-minded" and the "sick souled." "What James meant by the religiously healthy-minded," Ramsey says, "were those who systematically denied the existence of contingency, relativism, and possible evil, whose 'sky-blue optimism' was built on a conscious rejection of any experience of life as 'curdling cold and gloom.'" This was not an absurd option—it was "consonant with important currents in human nature" and it provided practical results, endowing the self with "a sense of practical efficacy." But it was also "deceptive and dangerous" in its incapacity to acknowledge failure. For James, the optimist's "contentment with the finite incases him like a lobster-shell and shields him from all morbid repining at his distance from the Infinite."

The sick-souled self, to the contrary, "was not just mildly melancholic but pathologically so, an individual with an all-embracing sensitivity to the negative in life, an 'extremity of pessimism.'" This was the truly religious individual "for whom the world appeared as a 'double-storied mystery'" and who says with Saint Paul, "'What I should, that do I not; but what I hate, that I do,' . . . self-loathing, self-despair, an unintelligible and intolerable burden to which one is mysteriously the heir."

James was sick-souled himself. In Ramsey's reading, he had offered his earlier doctrine of self-realization as if to displace his melancholy, and that of his age, through a simple, curative act of will. Now, however, he relabeled that cure deceptive and looked, instead, to religious conversion as that "crisis of self-surrender" through which the sick-souled self is conjoined to a "wider life," in which "religious ideas, previously peripheral to [its] consciousness, now take a central place, and . . . religious aims [now] form the habitual center of [its] energy." In this conversion, melancholy is not covered over, but redeemed as the finite soul's means of perceiving its need to submit its will to the "wider spiritual life" that delimits "our superficial consciousness" and opens it to the unseen.

RAMSEY'S powerful theses are, first, that this doctrine of conversion was James' alternative to both the unrelieved melancholy and the deceptive healthy-mindedness of his age; and, second, that we would have good reason to take up the doctrine ourselves, as an alternative to both the nihilistic relativisms of postmodernity *and* the spate of healthy-minded religious sects that now advertise themselves as cures to this relativism. James would easily recognize the dialectic that characterizes our own America—between cynical individualism on the one side and romantic religiosity on the other. And we would have good reason to trust his suspicions that the latter may, down deep, be as uncertain of its faith as the former: unwilling to resign itself to the sad realities that God may at times offer us, as well as the happy.

Ramsey's situated philosophic reading finds in James more of an ally than we might have realized of sober-minded faithfulness, in the tradition, for example, of Reinhold

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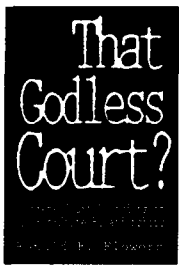

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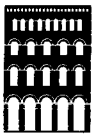

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Neibuhr's Christian pragmatism, or of what we might call the biblical realisms of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck among Christians, or of Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, and now Moshe Greenberg, Michael Wyschogrod, and David Novak among Jews. In mentioning these examples, however, I realize that I am also pushing James' realism further than he or Ramsey would want to.

A realist (or a non-nominalist), we might say, believes not only that we encounter what is real directly in our experience of the world, but also that we do so by way of, and not despite, our use of language. A biblical realist believes, furthermore, that we directly encounter the real by way of our use of biblical language. In these terms, James criticizes healthy-minded believers for employing religious or biblical language to cover over, rather than encounter, certain unwanted aspects of our experience of reality. In his corrective appeal to direct experience, however, James also displays a suspicion that the use of language may in general tend to cover up more than it reveals. This is a sense that the "something more" to which the converted self is reopened is also something more than can make its way into words. There is no oppressive nominalism here: even James' "A World of Pure Experience" offers a wondrous paean to our living in a world both of real objects and of real relations, like love or understanding or experience. Along with the other classical pragmatists, James has simply not yet shared in the later twentieth century's linguistic turn—nor in its discovery that real relations may be displayed by way of linguistic practices. Thus, despite his elegant effort, Ramsey cannot fully achieve his ultimate goal of transforming James into a postmodern realist: a sick-souled pragmatist, that is, whose accounts of our experiences of the real could withstand the efforts of postmodern nominalists to reduce such accounts to "mere" linguistic play.

A CASE IN point is James' agnostic description of religion as, for example, "the belief that beyond each man and in a fashion continuous with him there exists a larger power which is friendly to him and to his ideals." The term "larger power" won't stand up to linguistic criticism: how does it get attached to the "other" in religious experience? James does better when he notes that "God is the natural appellation, for us Christians at least, for the supreme reality, so I will call the higher part of the universe by the name of God." But out of what biblical stories, interpreted by what hermeneutical traditions, have James and his philosophic forebears borrowed this name of God? If the name refers to reality, it must refer by way of the role it plays in those stories and those traditions. Otherwise, it is an empty linguistic operator whose relation to anyone's actual experience is either mysterious or as arbitrary as the postmodernists claim.

If, on the other hand, the name has a textual life, then it can be misused.

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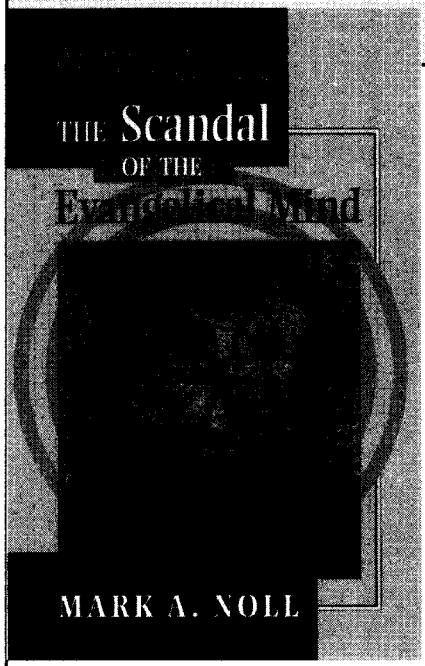

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James accuses Hegel of such a misuse, of promoting a healthy-minded "theistic monism" that reduces the plurality of divine relations to one. I fear, however, that Ramsey may himself perpetuate another misuse. Reading James' critique of monism as a critique of "monotheism," he allows his reader to imagine that James censured the biblical accounts of God themselves, rather than attempts by modern philosophers to reduce those accounts to simple monisms. That this is a dangerous reading is evident in Ramsey's own conclusion that "pragmatism did away with monism in all its forms: in its religious form of monotheism, the worship of the One God, One truth, and One right way." A Marcionite turn? This is not the conclusion of the founder of pragmatism, Charles Peirce, who wrote that his pragmatism simply enunciated Jesus' teaching that "ye may know them by their fruits!" The problem for pragmatism is not one God, but attempts to reduce God's name to the unity of mere concepts, rather than the oneness-among-many displayed in both Jewish and Christian scriptural traditions. More careful textual study is needed here, in the fashion of the scriptural realists mentioned earlier.

My complaint, however, is only with the way Ramsey labels his and James' strongest claim, not with the way he performs it. The way Ramsey has composed this book displays a "will of resignation" worthy both of James' "religious soul" and of the biblical realism mentioned earlier: this is a will to hear the reality in philosophic or rational claims, by hearing them in the human contexts out of which they were uttered and into which they are now received. Such an author would undoubtedly hear more in my complaint than I might yet recognize, and I would be instructed by his hearing.

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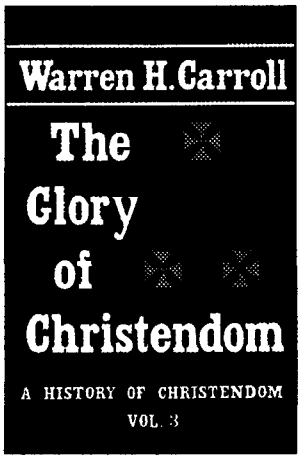

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GEORGE GRANT: A BIOGRAPHY. By WILLIAM CHRISTIAN. *University of Toronto Press. 472 pp. $39.95.*

Reviewed by **Daniel Westberg**

IN CONSIDERING Canada's contribution to twentieth-century intellectual life, one might think of the novels of Margaret Atwood and Robertson Davies, or the literary criticism of Northrop Frye, or even the flashy insights of Marshall McLuhan. For some, there might be the philosophy of Charles Taylor. In terms of actual impact on Canadian intellectuals in the last generation, however, it is George Grant who looms as a major figure. He deserves to be better known in the United States, especially to readers of FIRST THINGS. And the recent biography by William Christian is a major contribution to furthering the public's acquaintance with Grant's personality, career, and thought.

George Grant was a professor of philosophy (mostly at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario) who had a wide audience through his public lectures and contributions to mass circulation magazines. He disliked the narrow analytic approach of his discipline and ignored fashionable trends in favor of the grand picture. Grant was a Christian, a deep thinker, even something of a mystic, and a commentator with insight into developments not only in Canada but in the entire Western world.

One reason for his lack of recognition in the United States could be his reputation as an anti-American. He was vehemently opposed to the Vietnam war, and he put this in a larger context of a critique of American imperialism. In this respect he provided useful ammunition for Canadian leftists in the 1960s and 1970s.

False conclusions were drawn, however, about Grant's politics. As

DANIEL WESTBERG *teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia.*

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this book shows, Grant usually voted conservative, was an ally of the unfashionable John Diefenbaker, and throughout his adult career was strongly antiliberal (both political party and ideology). What Grant was opposed to was statist liberalism, mega-government, and the patterns imposed on modern life by bureaucratic thinking.

He was born in Toronto in 1918, educated at Queen's University (in Kingston, Ontario), and, as a Rhodes Scholar, at Oxford during two periods interrupted by the Second World War. One of the strongest impressions on Grant at Oxford was the clear and forceful thought of C. S. Lewis at meetings of the Socratic Club.

In England during the blitz, and also in a time of personal turmoil, he had an experience of God (reminiscent of what Lewis himself described in *Surprised by Joy*). Grant was getting off his bicycle to open a gate; he walked his bike through and closed the gate behind him, and "as he did so, it just came to him at once, in a moment and forever, that all was finally well, that God existed."

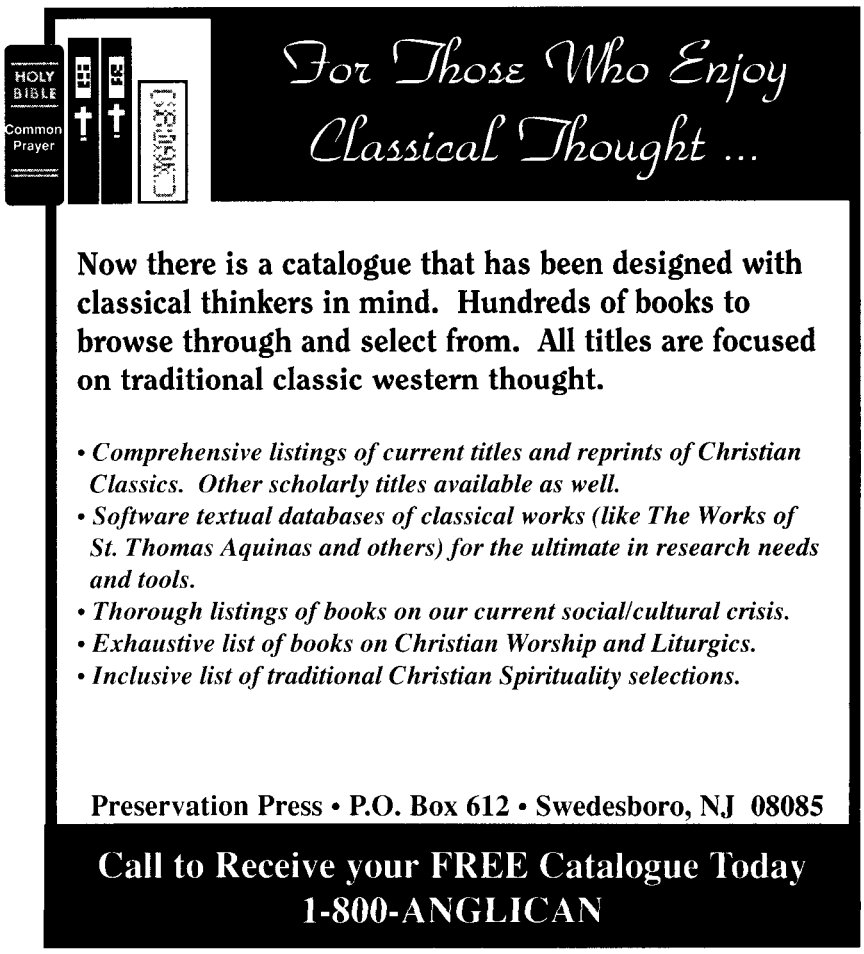
Originally Presbyterian by family background, Grant joined and remained in the Anglican Church of Canada, though at times unhappily when church committees took liberal stands on abortion and euthanasia. A major theme of Grant's work is the relationship of mainline Christianity to North American culture, and this is one reason why he deserves attention: he offers a valuable perspective on American culture, from outside—but not very far outside—of the United States. He knew us well.

He also knew where to look for truth. Although influenced by Kant and, for a while, by Hegel and David Strauss, the major influences on Grant's thought were Plato, Augustine, and Simone Weil. Grant probably would be better known today if he had written the major work on technology or the freedom of the will that he once contemplated doing. As it is, his legacy takes the form of some powerful essays in a few slim collections: *Technology and Empire, English-Speaking Justice,* and *Technology and Justice* (the last two are in print in the U.S. from the University of Notre Dame Press).

William Christian has drawn on a large body of correspondence, and on personal meetings with Grant's wife, Sheila (who shared in some of Grant's projects, especially the anti-abortion essays). The portrait that emerges is interesting and well drawn. Grant had a flair for drama, loved Mozart, and was often unkempt in dress. Mainly what the book conveys, however, is a deep understanding of and sympathy for his intellectual contribution. Grant's convictions as a Christian were an integral part of his worldview, which the book convincingly demonstrates.

The author draws attention to one of Grant's important insights—that Americans have no premodern history to go back to. There is a pre-Enlightenment Puritan heritage, of course; but for Grant the Puritans were already modern, at least in the crucial area of science and human progress. The tradition of contemplation, of understanding and enjoying (here Plato and Augustine are so important for Grant), has had little influence in America by comparison with the assumption that things in nature are meant to be used. This aspect of modernity goes back to the sixteenth century.

Another theme in Christian's book is the focus Grant brought to the significance of the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Grant wrote of the position taken by Justice Harry Blackmun that it was not only "monstrous," but a warning to us. In that decision we were warned, Grant felt, that we no longer know in advance what justice requires us to do, but only whether something is or is not technologically possible. In this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connection, Grant often quoted the words of Robert Oppenheimer: "If something is sweet, you have to go ahead with it."

Grant's antiliberalism was profound. He contrasted the traditional Greek view of justice, modified by Christianity, with the modern one:

> In the pretechnological era, the central Western account of justice clarified the claim that justice is what we are fitted for. It clarified why justice is to render each human being their due, and what was due to all human beings was "beyond all bargains and without an alternative." That account of justice was written down most carefully and most beautifully in *The Republic* of Plato. For those of us who are Christians, the substance of our belief is that the perfect living out of that justice is unfolded in the Gospels.

Modern thought, on the other hand, sees justice as contractual, as only a set of arrangements about which rational individuals would agree when they considered how best to promote their own interests.

The basis of Grant's critique is not a lament at the abandonment of Scripture or the effects of the Enlightenment attack on tradition, but a pointing to a deeper shift in Western liberalism from reason to the primacy of the will. Grant came to see this as the major problem affecting all of Western civilization. The West, he argued, has rejected both philosophy and revealed religion, and has now accepted purpose and value only as the creations of human will, as something arbitrary. Christian quotes from Grant's powerful *English-Speaking Justice* where Grant describes the darkness descending on justice in our modern era.

Grant shared the suspicions that many American conservatives have about the tyranny of big government, but he also extended this suspicion to technology itself (as the French sociologist, and Christian, Jacques Ellul did). And he applied his suspicion of social control by powerful corporate interests, and of the economic mentality in general, to moral problems in a bracing fashion:

> If tyranny is to come in North America, it will come cozily and on cat's feet. It will come with the denial of the rights of the unborn and of the aged, the denial of the rights of the mentally retarded, the insane, and the economically less-privileged. In fact, it will come with the denial of rights to all those who cannot defend themselves. It will come in the name of the cost-benefit analysis of human life.

THE CONTRIBUTION of George Grant's thought to North Americans is to provide a much broader context of concern than immediate political issues. The atmosphere of doom and gloom in his work (Charles Taylor described Grant in a *Canadian Encyclopedia* entry as "a brooding philosopher of apparently implacable pessimism") is not meant to engender hopelessness but rather an understanding of the dangers inherent in the future of Western culture if it does not undergo a change of direction.

This biography shows us not only the philosopher behind Grant's characteristically pessimistic views, but also brings out the positive side, his Christian faith. On one occasion, after a public lecture, someone asked him why he was being so pessimistic. Exasperated, Grant replied: "I'm not being pessimistic at all. I think God will eventually destroy this technological civilization. I'm very optimistic about that."

The Great Fear

THE GREEN CRUSADE: RETHINKING THE ROOTS OF ENVIRONMENTALISM. By CHARLES T. RUBIN. *Free Press. 320 pp. $22.95.*

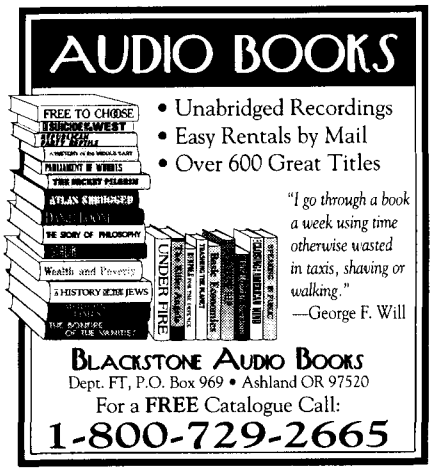
Reviewed by **Kenneth R. Weinstein**

IN FEBRUARY, readers of the *New York Times* were enticed by this puzzling headline: "Clinton to Order Effort to Make Pollution Fairer." Disappointingly, the article that followed merely explained that the President required federal agencies to certify that their programs do not inflict unfair environmental harm upon minorities and the poor. The influence of Benjamin Chavis, then the President of the NAACP and the loudest champion of "environmental justice" (the idea that racial justice is key to environmental policy), was apparent in this executive order.

The executive order seemed especially peculiar when juxtaposed with other stories on nature's inherent "unfairness," such as a winter of record snowfall and the January earthquake in Los Angeles. From whom, one might ask, does the fellow who lost his beach home in Malibu to February's mudslides seek redress for "environmental injustice"?

Though the champions of "environmental justice" may not realize the Pandora's Box that they have opened, the shift in the ecology movement from a focus on science to radical egalitarianism should come as no surprise. As Charles T. Rubin argues in *The Green Crusade: Rethinking the Roots of Environmentalism*, unscientific, alarmist forecasts, irresponsible as they are, are not the greatest failing of the

KENNETH R. WEINSTEIN *is Director of Research at the New Citizenship Project in Washington, D.C.*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Green movement. Rubin, therefore, does not content himself merely to dwell upon, for example, the Alar scare or Paul Ehrlich's claim that the oceans would disappear by 1979. Rather, according to Rubin, environmentalism's greatest threat is that "to save mankind," leading ecologists are willing to forsake liberty, pluralism, and the rule of law. Rubin, a professor of political science at Duquesne University, assesses environmentalism from the standpoint of liberal constitutionalism; he notes that major environmentalists aspire to transform every segment of human existence, from our economic transactions to our private lives.

Rubin examines the origins of the environmental movement to analyze how environmental questions became everyday concerns for most Americans. He claims that in our post-Enlightenment world faith in priestly authority has largely been displaced by faith in scientific authority. Environmental popularizers play off this faith by hiding behind distorted scientific evidence to bolster their agenda. While exploiting the fear of environmental disaster, ecologists dismiss their opponents as short-sighted defenders of capitalist class interest. Lacking scientific judgment, the press and policy makers tend to accept the warnings of popularizers, thereby ignoring the pseudo-science that undergirds their suppositions. These unfounded beliefs foster a sense of alarm among the public, thereby inciting demands for political action.

According to Rubin, the framework that popularizers have established for discussing ecological problems leads people to think of their solutions in wide-ranging terms. The problems are viewed as "environmental," rather than as, say, questions of carbon dioxide levels. Because the environment literally encompasses all things, those who wish to reform it are thus often led to advocate schemes of total control that would require massive changes in individual behavior and government policy.

Rubin devotes much of his book to summarizing and criticizing the roots of the environmentalist prescriptions for a safe and prosperous future. He shows how the fear of dire ecological disaster has repeatedly allowed the unscientific claims made by environmentalists and the consequences of the reforms they propose to escape unchallenged. Rachel Carson, who used faulty scientific evidence to decry "pesticide poisoning," was the last of the major environmentalists who did not present an overall scheme to rearrange American economic and political institutions.

By contrast, Barry Commoner, the populist academic who ran for President on the Citizens' Party ticket in 1980, calls for systemic change to save the environment. Commoner's Marxist-inspired economics and praise of Soviet planning reflect his belief that capitalists generate profits only if they pollute. In *The Poverty of Power* (1976), Commoner argues that we should fight profits and pollution by governing production centrally in the name of energy efficiency.

While Commoner is willing to empower an "ecological technocracy," the leaders of the zero-population growth movement, Paul and Anne Ehrlich, are comprehensive social engineers who believe that nearly all of human existence, from education to entertainment to tax policy, must be restructured to overcome our natural desire to reproduce. (As the Ehrlichian nightmare of an overpopulated planet resembles Thomas Hobbes' state of nature, Rubin, whose book is replete with useful references to Descartes and Heidegger, could well have compared the Ehrlichs' scheme to Hobbes' radical absolutism.) The Ehrlichs speak openly of the need for sterilization policy in underdeveloped countries; another anti-population schemer, Garrett Hardin, speaks of giving magistrates unparalleled authority to limit growth. Their ideas for interfering in the most intimate of human relations should worry anyone who thought that, say, kindly Judge Robert Bork posed a challenge to individual freedom.

Whereas Rubin skillfully examines

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the role of the popularizer and shows us how the population explosion crowd is willing to interfere in the most intimate of human relations, he goes a bit too far when he depicts the Club of Rome's call for global planning as totalitarian. *The Limits to Growth* (1972) did call for extensive computer modeling to save the planet from overpopulation and natural resource depletion, but, as Rubin admits, Dennis and Donella Meadows and Jay Forrester never explore the institutional mechanisms to implement their plan. In analyzing the club's follow-up volume—Eduard Pestel and Mihajlo Mesarovic's *Mankind at the Turning Point* (1974)—Rubin similarly argues that the extensive regional planning they propose is totalitarian because sectorial planning must be subordinated to the whole. Rather than focusing on parts and wholes, a framework that at times seems semantic, Rubin might have more instructively examined the tension between, for instance, technocracy, national sovereignty, and democracy.

If Rubin's criticism of the Club of Rome seems stretched, his focus on E. F. Schumacher seems outdated. Schumacher, the author of, among other works, *Small is Beautiful* (1973), sought to replace mass capitalism with labor-intensive technologies. Schumacher believed that this decentralization would end the crude materialist exploitation of nature and promote meaningful communion with the whole. Schumacher's mysticism, as Rubin notes, indeed does seem to deny pluralism itself. But however influential Schumacher's work may have been a decade ago, Rubin would have done better to offer a detailed analysis of the current strains influencing environmentalism, including "environmental justice" or the animal rights movement.

The animal rights movement, under the direction of Peter Singer, has been the fastest-growing part of the environmental crusade. Its effects are apparent in, among various other phenomena, the boom in pet cemeteries, the anti-fur crusade, and the growing opposition to animal experimentation. Readers interested in a theoretical critique of animal rights as antiliberal would do well to consult Luc Ferry's 1992 work *Le nouvel ordre écologique* (*The New Ecological Order*, scheduled to be published in translation by the University of Chicago Press in 1995). Ferry, a leading French neo-Kantian, also explores the theoretical links between German Romanticism, Nazi legislation to protect forests and animals, and deep ecology's antimodern diatribes.

DEEP ECOLOGISTS, Rubin reminds us, claim that the roots of our ills are more profound than our system of industrial organization. This movement, founded by Norwegian social critic Arne Naess, rejects as "anthropocentric" the notion that humans have greater inherent worth than other life forms. In seeking to root out man's claim to a special status in the universe, deep ecologists are pagan pantheists who reject biblical religion, especially the injunction of Genesis 1:28 to "Fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the seas, the birds of the sky, and all the living beings that move on this earth." Deep ecology has increasingly become a standard to judge other parts of the Green movement, and has exercised enormous popular influence through such films as *Dances with Wolves*, *The Big Blue*, and *Jurassic Park*.

As articulated by Naess and Bill Devall, deep ecology is more a moral movement than a political one; it seeks to encourage "ecosophy," a mental state achieved by overcoming individuation and identifying with the whole of nature. But, as Rubin points out, this attempt to create a post-human hunter-gatherer who lives in mystic harmony with the whole remains deeply reliant upon the blessings of civilization, especially the peace secured by the Enlightenment.

Rubin has written a powerful analysis of the peculiar and dangerous threat to democratic liberties posed by environmentalism. This movement is deeply at odds with science and, in fact, with nature itself.

BRIEFLY NOTED

THE GROUND WE SHARE: EVERYDAY PRACTICE, CHRISTIAN AND BUDDHIST. By ROBERT AITKEN and DAVID STEINDL-RAST. *Triumph Books. 232 pp. $27.95.*

Aitken is a Zen Buddhist Roshi and one of the most active and articulate American teachers of, and apologists for, Zen. Steindl-Rast is a Benedictine monk who has a wide knowledge of non-Christian religions and a special interest, both practical and theoretical, in Buddhism. This book is an edited transcript of conversations held between them in Hawaii in 1991. It provides an excellent conspectus of the state of play in Buddhist-Christian dialogue as practiced by the leisured and religiously inclined middle classes in the United States in the early 1990s. The discussion proceeds from three axioms: that Buddhism and Christianity are complementary rather than opposed; that the choice to be a Buddhist or a Christian is a "personal thing"; and that those who think there is more than personal preference at stake in this matter are "less accomplished" than those who do not. None of these points is argued for; their truth is taken to be self-evident, as it usually is by participants in interreligious dialogue. On the basis of them Steindl-Rast and Aitken offer some interesting (and occasionally profound) observations on religious practice, religious institutions, and the religious emotions. But in the end this is just one more self-help book, lightly seasoned with religious rhetoric. It won't tell you much about either Buddhism or Christianity, though it will (inadvertently) give you a detailed picture of the things that the contemporary American middle classes find it especially difficult to deal with: divorce, emotional dysfunction, sexual harassment, and (of course) authority.

— *Paul J. Griffiths*

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Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions. By David B. Burrell, C.S.C. *University of Notre Dame Press. 211 pp. $29.95 cloth, $13.95 paper.*

With wonderful clarity and compression, this book presents a series of subtle philosophical and theological discussions concerning the doctrine of creation. Burrell devotes particular attention to the relation of divine causality to human action and freedom, as these issues have been treated by major Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thinkers. Thus, in marked contrast to much standard Western philosophical theology—where these issues are often studied in abstraction from their specific religious contexts—this book both exemplifies and advocates a comparative and tradition-centered approach. Burrell strives to do philosophical theology in a pluralistic mode instead of being content merely to talk about doing it.

— Augustine Di Noia

Tocqueville's Civil Religion: American Christianity and the Prospects for Freedom. By Sanford Kessler. *SUNY Press. 238 pp. $17.95.*

Kessler, who teaches political science at North Carolina State and Duke, believes that Tocqueville would be sympathetic to today's proponents of a "functionalist" approach to religion (he has in mind Stephen Carter, Richard John Neuhaus, and Glenn Tinder, and, to a lesser extent, Robert Bellah). At the same time, Kessler suspects that Christianity in America may be too weak to serve democracy today as Tocqueville thought it did in the early nineteenth century. A modest and generally intelligent discussion.

God's Salesman: Norman Vincent Peale and the Power of Positive Thinking. By Carol V. R. George. *Oxford University Press. 268 pp. $9.95 paper.*

Adlai Stevenson famously quipped that he found Paul appealing and Peale appalling, there being no evidence that Stevenson had read either with care, if at all. Carol George of Hobart and William Smith Colleges makes a real contribution to our understanding of contemporary American religion by taking both Peale and his many critics seriously. Although she does not say so, many of the debates about Peale's very "enculturated" form of Christianity continue today in connection with the marketing techniques of the church growth movement. *God's Salesman* is an engaging and informative read, and an excellent window on the curious things that millions of Americans mean by saying that they are Christians.

"Come, Black Robe": De Smet and the Indian Tragedy. By John J. Killoren, S.J. *University of Oklahoma Press. 447 pp. $29.95.*

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ther Peter John De Smet, a Belgian Jesuit, began a half century of heroic labor on behalf of American Indians. In evangelizing, educating, and building communities, De Smet left a large but not indelible mark. The depredations of the traders and settlers, joined to the perfidy of politicians, erased much that De Smet and his colleagues had achieved. De Smet became a powerful advocate of what today would be called the rights of Native Americans, which then was generally viewed as an eccentric and inconvenient obsession. This is a great story well told. Over it all, however, hangs the tragedy alluded to by the subtitle, a tragedy that shows no sign of lifting to this day.

TENSIONS OF ORDER AND FREEDOM: CATHOLIC POLITICAL THOUGHT, 1789-1848. By BÉLA MENCZER. *Transaction. 205 pp. $32.95.*

First published in 1952, this intriguing study of Catholic political thought between 1789 and 1848 by a Hungarian intellectual in exile highlights the continuing war between tradition and utopian revolutionism. Includes a new introduction by the late Russell Kirk.

PROFESSING THE FAITH. By DOUGLAS JOHN HALL. *Augsburg/Fortress. 563 pp. $35.*

This is the second in a trilogy that is designed to set forth "Christian Theology in a North American Context." Hall is a United Church of Christ minister who teaches at McGill. Although working in what is undoubtedly a liberal Protestant tradition, Hall does not limit himself to that tradition. His influence in the mainline/oldline churches is very considerable, and the present volume provides helpful insight into those religious worlds that at present receive little serious intellectual attention.

JEWISH MEDITATIONS ON THE MEANING OF DEATH. By CHAIM Z. ROZWASKI. *Aronson. 213 pp. $30.*

Despite the book's title, these short sermonic essays deal not so much with the meaning of death as the meaning of life in the face of death. Occasionally inspiring, Rabbi Rozwaski draws on a richness of Jewish sources—scriptural, talmudic, rabbinic, folk. There is relatively little speculation about the afterlife here, but in the best Jewish tradition, the hope and expectation of a world to come is strongly affirmed.

THE PRESBYTERIANS. By RANDALL BALMER and JOHN R. FITZMIER. *Praeger. 132 pp. $14.95 paper.*

An overview of Presbyterianism in Europe and North America written from a generally liberal perspective that includes the assumption that the price of cultural "relevance" may be institutional decline. Designed, apparently, for use in the college classroom.

IN THE SHADE OF THE TEREBINTH. By GABRIEL MEYER. *Forest of Peace (P.O. Box 269 Leavenworth, KS 66048). 142 pp. $14.95.*

The fictional elaboration of biblical narratives is a parlous genre. Meyer offers us a young boy and a sage who unfold events occurring at the edges of the familiar accounts of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. The experiment succeeds in holding our attention in large part because Meyer has the good sense and skill to work by indirection, leaving it to the reader to reflect on what these stories might mean for our understanding of the gospel accounts.

ACCOUNTING FOR FUNDAMENTALISMS. Edited by MARTIN E. MARTY and R. SCOTT APPLEBY. *University of Chicago Press. 852 pp. $47.50.*

The fourth volume in the Fundamentalism Project directed by Marty and Appleby includes twenty-eight essays on Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and South Asian "fundamentalisms." Such a grab-bag approach inevitably results in very uneven quality, although there is a common denominator in the way it is made clear that fundamentalists are certainly not like the people who write about them for projects such as this.

TO SET THE DAWN FREE: WHEN LIFE AND CHOICE COLLIDE. Edited by DAVID MALL. *Kairos (Libertyville, IL). 352 pp. $15.*

"When God sends the dawn, he sends it for all," wrote Miguel de Cervantes, and these fifteen powerful essays urging that "all" must include the unborn add significantly to our understanding of the rhetoric of the abortion debate. Readers engaged in that debate will welcome both the fresh arguments advanced and, perhaps less wholeheartedly, the challenge to old arguments that are doomed to fail. Introduction by Nat Hentoff.

THE RITUAL YEAR: CHRISTMAS, WINTER, AND OTHER SEASONS. By ARNOLD KENSETH. *Amherst Writers (P.O. Box 1076, Amherst MA 01004). 123 pp. $14 paper.*

Kenseth is a poet and Episcopalian priest who here brings together work that reinforces his reputation as an artist of feeling and expression. It is said that today there are more people writing poems than reading them. Reading Kenseth is likely to set more people to writing, which is not a bad thing.

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THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

Science, Religion, and Volleyball

Science is science and religion is religion and never the twain shall meet. It is a wondrously convenient formula for not thinking very seriously about either science or religion. We came across an article a while back in which a journalist visited with a group of Jesuit astronomers who man the Vatican observatory in the American Southwest. How do they square their science with their theology, the journalist wanted to know. The repeated answer, given with some impatience, is that the two have nothing to do with one another. The journalist was not satisfied with that, as well he should not be. Science tells us about the world, and theology tells us about the God who created and sustains the world. Therefore science tells us important things about what God is doing, and theology tells us important things about the source and ends of the world that is the object of scientific interest.

Nonetheless, scientists and theologians conspire to make sure that never the twain shall meet. Scientists typically exhibit the greater cognitive confidence. They are often contemptuously dismissive of theology, while theologians are frequently glad enough to be left alone, undisturbed by inconvenient challenges from the scientists. An instance of the contemptuously dismissive is provided by Dr. David E. H. Jones of the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, better known by his pen name, Daedelus. Writing in the British journal *Nature* in an article picked up by the science writer of the *New York Times*, Jones suggests, presumably tongue in cheek, that it should be possible to weigh the soul.

By attaching piezoelectric transducers and other instruments to a dying person, it should be possible to measure the direction, velocity, and spin of the soul as it leaves the body, causing the body to recoil slightly. The change in body weight would reveal the soul's mass. "Traditional theology," writes Jones, "is silent on the spin of the soul, though it may predict that the soul of a sinner would depart downward, and might weigh less than that of a righteous believer." Soul measurements could also be helpful with the abortion debate, he suggests. By applying a soul detector to a pregnant woman, one could determine when the soul enters the embryo or fetus. "It is clearly worthwhile," says Dr. Jones, "to establish this moment accurately. If the soul turns out to enter the fetus quite late in pregnancy, the religious arguments against contraception and early abortion will be neatly disproved." He does not say what conclusion should be drawn were it determined that the soul is there from conception.

But of course all this is as silly as it is contemptuous. Although there are many people, President Clinton for instance, who continue to speak of the soul as a bodily appendage, a thing that should not be killed. Before it is appended to the baby, however, it is permissible to kill the baby's body. The President says he learned this from his Baptist pastor and, given the sorry state of catechesis in contemporary Christianity, that is quite possibly true. It is the case that the worthy Tertullian (d. 225) seemed to hold to the corporeity of the soul, and presumably such a soul could be weighed. But traditional theology has taken the soul to be a spiritual substance. Spiritual substances, being spirit, cannot be weighed.

But scientists will have their fun. Soul-weighing is but a variant on the old chestnut about scholastic theologians debating how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Any scholastic theologian, indeed any literate Christian, would recognize that such a debate is utterly otiose. Being spiritual beings, angels do not take up space and therefore an infinite number can dance on the head of a pin, or any other place they fancy. Dr. Jones and his readers have their chuckle, and theologians take it in good sport instead of pointing out, politely of course, that such Jonesian bigotry rests upon the foundation of an ignorance that is quite appalling in an otherwise educated person. Many theologians, indeed, join in the chuckle, smugly observing that of course no

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point has been scored since when theologians talk about the soul (if in fact they still talk about the soul at all) they are employing an entirely different "language system," quite unrelated to the language of scientific discourse.

This ploy achieves self-parody in, for instance, the best-selling Episcopalian bishop in New Jersey who assures us that, although the body of the pitiable fanatic Jesus has long since rotted in Palestine, talk about the resurrection is frightfully "meaningful." Writers of more scholarly credibility also employ the ploy. They propose a neat division of labor; the scientists take the "fact" language and the theologians take the "meaning" language, and neither need step on the other's toes. Of course the scientists, with exceptions, have not agreed to this arrangement. And quite rightly so. Meanings are of interest when they explain the meaning of facts, so those who have been given a monopoly on the facts will likely end up in charge of the meaning business as well. Which is pretty much what has been happening in our public discourse over the last few centuries. Of course this does not prevent anyone from engaging in the private indulgence of religion, along with other private indulgences such as a taste for mocha chocolate ice cream or the poetry of Edna St.Vincent Millay.

Serving into the Other Court

But through the years there has been a small band of theologians and scientists who have persisted in thinking hard about the hard questions. On the theological side, one such is Wolfhart Pannenberg, 1994 Erasmus Lecturer and frequent contributor to this journal. This year Westminster/John Knox Press has brought out his *Toward a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith* (166 pp., $19.99 paper). This book deserving of a wide readership is enhanced by a lucid introduction to Pannenberg's thought on these questions by Ted Peters, a Lutheran theologian teaching in California.

In the last century or so, says Peters, theologians "have trod lightly on questions regarding God and the natural world, ceding to the scientific community the priestly right to dispense the graces of understanding nature. Now, however, Pannenberg seems to be profaning what Western Enlightenment culture has held sacred. He is . . . reentering the epistemological holy of holies and contending that loss of an awareness of God actually constricts what we learn about the nature of nature." For scientists who take Pannenberg's challenge to heart, "it means a return to the laboratory with a reassessment of the meaning of existing evidence and a posing of new questions for future research."

Since the consolidation of the natural sciences in the modern university, the relationship between science and religion might be pictured in terms of volleyball. On one side of the net is *scientism*, on the other religious *authoritarianism*. Scientism views religion's claims as pseudo-knowledge, and "fundamentalism" (whether biblical or ecclesiastical) views the claims of science as, at best, partial knowledge subject to correction by revelation. In recent years, a new twist has been provided by *scientific creationists* who contend that they are playing by the rules of science, and by those rules they have determined that the biblical account of creation is more scientifically convincing than the theory of evolution.

Peters explains how the volleyball game goes on from there, or, as is usually the case, does not go on from there:

> What we would expect to find is a hotly contested game between the established natural scientists on one side, and, on the other side, any one of the three: the ecclesiastical authoritarians, the fundamentalist authoritarians, or the scientific creationists. What we would expect to find is a spirited match to settle the matter, to see who wins and who loses. Surprisingly, however, twentieth-century watchers have seen very little competitive volleying across the net. Why? Because the majority of players on both sides have adopted the *two-language rule*. According to the two-language theory, scientists and theologians work in separate domains of knowledge, speak separate languages, and when true to their respective disciplines, avoid interfering in each other's work. What we end up with are two teams, each sparring with its own volleyball on its respective side of the net. If the creationists who reject the two-language rule serve the ball into the scientists' court, the scientists do not bother to return it. But when the players of the fourth string made up of liberal or neo-orthodox theologians take the religious side of the court, they tout the two-language rule and send nothing over the net. This has kept the scientific team happy for most of the present century.

Suffice it to say that Pannenberg and a few others have been serving into the scientists' court for some years now, and an increasing number of scientists, especially physicists, have been returning the serves. There are not yet enough teams to form a league, but that may come with time. In his *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, in his three-volume *Systematic Theology* (now appearing in English), and in the present book of essays, Pannenberg presses the implications of saying that nature must be understood as history, that contingent events are temporally unique, and that what we now know of thermodynamics confirms the irreversibility of time. Theology, Pannenberg suggests, is the study of the

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history of God, and Christian theology is such study in the light of the promised fulfillment of history in Christ and the coming Kingdom. Such seemingly exotic speculation leads to surprises. For instance, it may be that when Michael Faraday and Albert Einstein spoke of the "force field" in physics, they had in mind, knowingly or not, what theology means by the Holy Spirit.

Of course that way of putting it may suggest another version of the old two-language game. But this time, at least, scientists and theologians understand that they are talking about the same reality, how the world really is and what reasonably can be made of it. In studying the world scientists are studying God, and in studying God theologians are studying the world. Since the Enlightenment the studying and talking has been segregated, each on its own side of the net, each developing a language and habits of thought apparently incommensurable with the other. This segregation has everything to do with the marginalization of religion in public life, since it is assumed that what counts as real knowledge in public is scientific knowledge, and it is further assumed that what is scientific is separate from, if not antithetical to, religion.

Of course Pannenberg is not alone in pressing the cause of desegregation. One thinks of contemporaries such as Arthur Peacocke, Robert John Russell, Stanley Jaki, and the many followers of Alfred North Whitehead. There are big differences among these thinkers, but all are devoted to resuming a collaboration that was most unnaturally disrupted by the recent unpleasantness of the secular Enlightenment. Their project and its underlying assumption that theology and science are both dealing with the one world of the one God would hardly have surprised Christian thinkers such as Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, or Calvin. A good introduction to the current state of the desegregation movement is Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Toward a Theology of Nature.*

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The Longest War

In the event that some readers have not yet read James Davison Hunter's *Before the Shooting Begins,* shame on you. Alright, so you can't read everything, but this is not just another important book. It is the best book-length analysis of what is meant by the culture war (the subtitle is *Searching for Democracy in America's Culture War*), and is made the more valuable by viewing the culture war through the prism of the abortion controversy—the most important single question in defining the opposing sides in the culture war. That we view the book as extremely important is evidenced by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's review essay in the June/July issue and our earlier comment on Hunter's argument in these pages and elsewhere.

We are regularly asked what we mean by this "culture war" we've been talking about for approximately the last ten years. The answer inevitably begins with what is meant by culture, and we will not repeat what we have said on that so many times before. Rather, let's let James Hunter take a crack at the question: "*Culture is nothing if it is not, first and foremost, a normative order by which we comprehend ourselves, others, and the larger world and through which we order our experience.* At the heart of culture is a system of norms and values, as social scientists are prone to call them. But these norms and values are better understood as *commanding truths* so deeply embedded in our consciousness and in the habits of our lives that to question them is to question reality itself. These commanding truths define the 'shoulds' and 'should nots' of our experience, and accordingly, the good and the evil, the right and the wrong, the appropriate and inappropriate, the honorable and the shameful. Accordingly, culture involves the obligations to adhere to these truths, obligations that come about by virtue of one's membership in a group."

Multiculturalism, as it is called in the academy, and moral emotivism, as it is found among the hoi poloi, inescapably trivialize culture. Multiculturalists are a group at war with the idea of belonging to a group. Hunter writes, "The bottom line is that one cannot hope to understand culture without understanding its central and commanding truth claims. But these claims imply standards, and standards imply the moral judgment that we are *not* the same and not on the same moral plane. Such standards and judgments violate the central lesson multiculturalism wants students everywhere to appropriate—that 'I am as good as you.'" The framework provided by multiculturalism makes it impossible to engage in reasoned argument on questions of moral consequence, such as abortion. "The reason," writes Hunter, "is that multiculturalism denies the very category of Differences that constitute the friction points between cultures—the substantive and, in this case, contradictory imperatives asserted by and embodied within different moral communities."

Hunter's extraordinary book is weakest when it comes to proposing an alternative to the culture war in terms of "the renewal of democracy." One is immeasurably grateful for an accurate diagnosis, even if the same physician is not so sure about the treatment. Hunter wants to find a "common ground" for democratic deliberation, debate, and decision that will replace the polarized and frenzied war of

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words that now passes for political discourse. At the same time, he knows that the differences in the culture war "go all the way down," and democratic renewal might be possible only at the end of the struggle. It is a little like the revolutionary maxim that things must get worse before they can get better. "Through a heightening of the tensions, we are continually reminded of the limitations of political action. We are reminded that politics, in the final analysis, is primarily effective in dealing with administrative tasks. It is not able to deal with the collective search for shared meanings, the formation of public philosophies of the public good, or the organic generation of civic obligation, responsibilities, and trust among the citizens who inhabit a community or society."

A Vision Wan and Wistful

Although it is not clear how that squares with Hunter's enthusiasm for Benjamin Barber's notion of "strong democracy," it is a sober and modest understanding of politics. In our political culture, it is usually conservatives who call for a modest understanding of politics and, especially, government action. Liberals typically embrace a more expansive understanding of the political and governmental sphere. (Those who style themselves radical go further, urging that "the personal is the political and the political is the personal.") The predicament, however, is that the larger the sphere of life that is defined as political the more we must deliberate in public the morality of our life together—our obligations, responsibilities, and ideas of the good. Conversely, the more limited the political sphere, the more those deliberations can be conducted in communities that are, while not private, certainly not public in the sense of being subject to government control. It is quite odd. Conservatives are ready, even eager, to engage in public discussions of morality that would not be necessary under their ideal of limited government. On the other hand, liberals are generally hostile to the public discussion of morality that is inescapable under their ideal of expansive government.

Then one is taken back to the question of whether legal protection for the unborn is an instance of expansive or limited government. We have been around that track many times, and will not take another turn now. For the moment, suffice it to note that one leaves *Before the Shooting Begins* and similar analyses with a very dour view of talk about "the renewal of democratic discourse and decision." Of course that is what we must continue to hope for and work for, but anything that resembles renewal will be, it appears almost certain, on the far side of some kind of resolution of the abortion question. It seems that civil discussion is precluded by the don't-give-an-inch rigidity of the pro-choice faction in refusing to acknowledge that there is any great moral question engaged in the termination of what is unquestionably human life, and by their adamantine opposition to even the most modest measures aimed at, for instance, ensuring informed consent by the woman or respecting the role of parents of minors. They seem to be convinced that any public admission that there are legitimate questions to be raised about the existing abortion regime would bring the whole thing crashing down. Maybe they're right in thinking that. One can understand why Harvard's Laurance Tribe and other abortion advocates so relentlessly insist that the public discussion be kept focused on choice, never on what is chosen.

The "renewal of democracy" part is where James Davison Hunter goes wan and wistful. Don't blame him; at this stage in the culture war nobody knows what such renewal might mean. Where there are openings for civil conversation and mutually respectful argument, we should not fail to welcome the opportunity. But in our political culture at present, such openings are few and far between. Nurturing such possibilities for conversation where they present themselves, and hoping that culture war may in time be replaced by civil engagement, in the short term we have no choice but to gird for battle. Battle is not the preferred metier of those who believe that moral truth can be ascertained through reasoned reflection. Battle is forced upon them by those who deny the reality of moral truth, or at least of moral truth that can have public standing. The culture war was declared by the nihilists, both sophisticated and raw, who declared politics to be nothing more than the contest of interests, the will to power. On the axial question of abortion, they are the ones who divide the world into the defenders of the unlimited abortion license on the one hand and everybody else on the other. They permit no consideration of alternatives, nothing that might respond to the yearning of the great majority of Americans for some kind of accommodation.

There is the time before the shooting begins and then the time after the shooting begins, and nobody knows how metaphorical that shooting will remain. But on the question around which all the other questions of the culture war gravitate, there is no alternative to continuing to press ahead on every front—in the parties, in national campaigns, in politics from counties to Congress, in the churches, schools, professional associations, everywhere. The defenders of the unlimited abortion license know that *Roe v. Wade* is not "settled doctrine" in American law and life, and it is the business of those who understand what is at stake to make it more unsettled every day. "Every unborn child protected in law and welcomed in life." That is the goal. It will never be achieved perfectly, of course, given the human bent toward indifference, cruelty, and injustice. But it can be approximated in a manner

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that is secured by democratic consent. This may be many years away. But only when that happens is it believable to think that the culture war might give way to something like a renewal of democratic discourse about how we ought to order our life together.

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Mr. Rorty's Terrible Uncertainties

Among intellectual celebrities, Richard Rorty's fifteen minutes go on and on. In a long interview in the *University of Chicago Magazine*, he explains how he got to be the way he is. A red-diaper baby, he had Trotskyite parents who found the meaning of their lives bestowed by the promise of "come the revolution." Richard, however, was "a clever, snotty, nerdy only child" (his description), more interested in orchids than revolutions. Yet he wanted an understanding that was an understanding of everything. At age fifteen he came across his aim expressed in the words of Yeats—"hold reality and justice in a single vision." First in Plato, then in Hegel, then in other systems, he thought for a time that he had found knowledge that is "beyond hypothesis."

Later he discovered that there is no such thing, reality is rhetoric, things are as you describe them to be. This is the consolation and resignation of the "liberal ironist." Oh, for some people, certainty—Plato's knowledge beyond hypothesis, beyond doubt, beyond critical self-consciousness—might be possible. For revolutionaries, for instance, "who are moved by nothing save the thought of social justice." And for those Christians. "I decided that only religion—only a nonargumentative faith in a surrogate parent who, unlike any real parent, embodied love, power, and justice in equal measure—could do the trick Plato wanted done. Since I couldn't imagine becoming religious, and indeed had gotten more and more raucously secularist, I decided that the hope of getting a single vision by becoming a philosopher had been a self-deceptive atheist's way out."

He speaks of not being able to become religious in the way that most of us cannot imagine becoming Mexican. As though "religiousness" is something that happens to some people and doesn't happen to others. Moreover, as in his book, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, religion (in his case meaning Christianity) appears as a guarantor of certitude, instead of being precisely a reasoned commitment of faith in a reality that will never get "beyond hypothesis" short of the coming of the kingdom of God. His flaunted anxieties about the uncertainties of truth lead him to the convenient but superficial out of deciding not to worry about truth. In the name of complexity he embraces the simplism of "redescribing" intellectual sloth as virtue. It is a great sadness, and a greater sadness that he continues to be a leading retailer of designer fashions in the university.

Along the way he says, "I do not, however, want to argue that philosphy is socially useless." He speaks of a number of philosophers who made a difference, including John Dewey and Sidney Hook. "Had there been no Dewey or Hook, American intellectual leftists of the 1930s would have been as buffaloed by the Marxists as were their counterparts in France and in Latin America." Quoting Richard Weaver, he says, "Ideas do, indeed, have consequences." The irony does not occur to him that the Richard Rorty of today would not have been standing with Dewey, and certainly not with Hook, in the 1930s and 1940s. After all, why make endless arguments appealing to truth in a tedious struggle against Communist totalitarianism when it is ever so much easier, as Rortians have learned, to redescribe tyranny as freedom, and vice versa?

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While We're At It

■ There is endless dispute over what makes an idea, practice, or institution "religious." More simply, how should we define "religion" as distinct from other spheres of human life. Marc Gellman, a friend who bills himself as the only pro-life Reform rabbi in the country, is a gifted writer of children's books and is currently working on a book that introduces kids to the world religions. He thought and thought about what it is that all religions have in common. He finally came up with four components. Everything that we call a religion has (1) a story about how the world came to be and what it is for; (2) a code for living the moral life; (3) an answer to the problem of death. And the fourth? Every religion uses candles. We're thinking about it.

■ The famed Frankfurt philosopher Jürgen Habermas is asked, "What remains of socialism?" His unhesitating answer: "Radical democracy." He expands on that in an interview in the *New York Review of Books*: "I would add the rider that one thing we can still learn from the Marxist tradition today is the critique of capitalism. Indeed, this may be even more important today since capitalism has

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experienced a huge increase in self-confidence, thanks to the collapse of state socialism. Hardly anyone nowadays would venture to criticize capitalism. At the same time, we have seventeen million unemployed in the European Union alone, and no one—and that includes me—has any idea how we are going to break out of the cycles of jobless growth. In other words, we need new ideas with which to criticize this system. But the ultimate criterion must be the creation of a radical democracy, and this of course includes using welfare state measures to tame capitalism to some point where it becomes unrecognizable as such." Which being interpreted means: (1) The failure of socialism does not lead to the approval of capitalism. (2) State power should tame capitalism to the point where it is not recognizable as capitalism but is recognizable as socialism. (3) Socialism has not failed. Take our word for it, Habermas is a very famous philosopher.

■ The late M. E. Bradford was acclaimed by most of those who knew him as an exemplification of what it means to be a gentleman and a scholar. His brand of Southern conservatism, however, made him unwelcome in the more elevated precincts of academic correctitude, and his last years were marred by resentment of "neoconservatives" who, he believed, had joined with liberals in denying him the recognition, and employment, he deserved. It is a long and rather sad story, and we mention it only as preface to welcoming a revised edition of one of Bradford's very useful books, *Founding Fathers* (University Press of Kansas, 222 pp., $14.95). First published in 1981, *Founding Fathers* provides something that is not to be found anywhere else—brief biographical sketches of all those who participated in the Philadelphia convention of 1787 that produced the United States Constitution. Bradford clearly has his own very strong views, but he is remarkably dispassionate in depicting the lives, opinions, and characters of the founders, and can be admiring of those with whom he disagrees, such as Alexander Hamilton. He only loses it in discussing James Wilson of Pennsylvania, who went on to the Supreme Court where he initiated the mischief of treating the Constitution as a "living document" that need not be interpreted as its authors intended. In his introduction, Bradford says of the founders as a group: "They were not men who were speculative in their politics. With the possible exceptions of Madison, Hamilton, Wilson, and young Charles Pinckney III, they were prescriptive Whigs who had made a revolution on the model of the Glorious Revolution of 1688—in order to continue as they were." He notes that as many as thirty-five of the fifty-five framers were slave holders. They were, all in all, men of means, solidly ensconced in the gentry of their own states and recognized by their neighbors as the kind of "natural aristocrats" who were best trusted with the responsibilities of government. With no more than five exceptions, Bradford notes, "they were orthodox members of one of the established Christian communions." Bradford sums up his estimate of the founding company in this way: "They regarded the Union as conditional, an 'experiment' in George Washington's terms, and knew that it would require work and minor revision if the fundamental law was to operate as they hoped—but not too much revision or too often. Nevertheless, they meant for their form of government to last, and most of them were confident that it would, so long as it was not manipulated out of shape by ideology or human selfishness. They were not demigods and they did not 'invent' their country. But assuredly the passage of time has earned for them the right to be called a worthy company, a term of praise they would have clearly understood."

■ In the June/July issue we commented on an article in *Harper's* on the Pope by Barbara Grizzuti Harrison. (We invited her to confession, but she has not shown up to date.) Brawn Sullivan of Marysville, California writes to point out that we did not remark Harrison's saying that a gay friend who is active in several pastoral ministries told her that he would go to his cat for moral advice before he would go to his cardinal. Mr. Sullivan spots what he thinks may be a trend. He notes that Matthew Fox, the lapsed Catholic priest, says he has made his dog, Tristan, his spiritual director because the animal "enters into ecstasy without guilt." Having abandoned God and angels, mankind—partly angel, partly animal—goes to cats and dogs. We count on Mr. Sullivan to alert us to further sightings of this phenomenon. Meanwhile, readers are advised to stick with spiritual directors who feel guilty about the kinds of ecstasies favored by Matthew Fox.

■ "We don't want to be grumpy or just start a fight," said the Rev. John Rodgers of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry. "We are just a group of faithful Episcopalians who love their church but simply cannot support some things that have been done and be faithful to our baptismal and ordination vows." Rodgers chaired a national meeting in Atlanta that included seven bishops plus prominent clergy and lay leaders from around the country and produced a covenant titled "Episcopalians in Apostolic Mission." The signers say they wish to support the Episcopal Church but cannot go along with "tendencies contrary to official Anglican ethical standards," even if they are authorized by General Convention. "We will not conform ourselves to [such actions], we will not directly financially support them, nor will we permit those who engage in them to minister regularly within our congregational or diocesan life." The covenant calls for protection of human life "from conception to natural death" and affirms that sexual intimacy and intercourse should be limited to "heterosexual, monogamous, lifelong

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marriage." For more information, call Mr. Alfred Sawyer at 800-948-1781 or write St. John's Episcopal Church, 50 East Fisher Freeway, Detroit, MI 48201.

■ A group of Harvard students thought up the most outrageous group they could imagine and applied for recognition by the student government. The announcement was carried in the *Harvard Crimson*: "We are Students at Harvard Erotically Engaged With Pets, or S.H.E.E.P. We reject the use of clinical terms such as 'zoophilia' and describe ourselves as 'theriosexual,' a word which better describes the wild joy of our way of life.

"Though the bestial community is extremely diverse, embracing individuals from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds, we share a common experience of oppression and misunderstanding. We have been marginalized by an anthroposexist society solely on the basis of whom we choose to love. Because we refuse to form relationships according to socially constructed categories such as 'species,' we represent a fundamental challenge to the institutions and assumptions of a speciesist, theriophobic Western culture.

"You probably know some of us already. Research indicates that nearly one out of every ten males and more than one of every thirty females is theriosexual. Some of us form relationships solely across species lines; some of us enjoy both human and animal relationships. We are productive members of society, respected members of the community. And yet our lives are singled out for brutal repression by the laws of many states and by the prejudice of those who condemn our love for animals because they do not understand it.

"Fear and oppression have kept us silent for too long. It is time for us to speak out. We love animals. We are out, and proud."

■ To date he is unknown here, but in Finland he is a celebrity and there appears to be a growing number of Americans ready for his message. Pentti Linkola is a writer who supports himself by fishing in a rustic region, and lives in order to save the planet by means of annihilating most of the human race. He proposes ending third world aid and asylum for refugees, plus mandatory abortions for women who already have two children. Another world war would be "a happy occasion for the planet," he suggests. Humanity is like a sinking ship with 100 passengers and a lifeboat that can hold only ten. "Those who hate life try to pull more people on board and drown everybody. Those who love and respect life use axes to chop off the extra hands hanging on the gunwale." Mr. Linkola's sworn enemies, reasonably enough, are the Pope and Amnesty International. He also despises America. "The U.S. symbolizes the worst ideologies in the world: growth and freedom." In Finland, where he is described as an "eco-fascist," Linkola is an exceedingly popular author. This *Wall Street Journal* story notes that even fellow Malthusians in this country find Linkola a bit much. "We have many possibilities that should be explored before we take a strong-armed approach," says Garrett Hardin, who in 1974 wrote a much discussed article, "Living on a Lifeboat." Dr. Hardin has never been accused of squeamishness when it comes to reducing the number of those whom he views as the parasitical poor, although in his article he stopped short of chopping hands from the gunwale. Hardin, retired from the University of California, writes today for *Chronicles*, a magazine published in Rockford, Illinois, which champions what it calls "Old Right" conservatism. In an article in the June issue, Hardin attacks the notion that we can continue to think that having babies is "a purely private matter" to be left up to parents. Decisions about what children should be born and how or whether "abnormal babies" should be cared for "are best made on the basis of opportunity costs to the community." All this is in the context of discussing national health care and the need to ration scarce medical resources. "A national health care system will be well justified," writes Hardin, "if it reinstates discrimination as a proper function of the social order." He wants it understood that he does not mean racial discrimination. The discrimination he has in mind is that between the fit and the unfit. He is not terribly hopeful that what needs to be done can be done. He writes, "The final solution (if there is one) is unknowable." Final solution? Final solution? Why does that phrase sound so familiar?

■ From several places around the country we've been sent clippings on cases where courts are ordering churches to return money donated by people who then declared bankruptcy. The question posed is whether this is a threat to religious freedom. We're not a law firm and of course each case is different, but it would seem that there are instances in which churches would rightly be required to return money. Say that Nancy X owes $100,000 to creditors for services rendered or goods delivered. Just before declaring bankruptcy, she gives $100,000 to her church. If she had given it to Uncle Charlie or the United Way, they would be required to give it back. Why shouldn't a church be similarly compelled? It would seem to be an elementary question of justice to creditors. The sticky part comes when Nancy declares that she was not simply transferring funds but was in fact giving the money to the church in return for services rendered. Those who are worried about these cases say the courts have now put themselves in the position of saying churches do not in fact render services. There may be something, a very little something, to that worry. The flip side, however, is whether churches want to put themselves in the position of claiming that they are selling their spiritual services. Hard cases make bad law and, we expect, unwarranted worries about

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religious freedom.

■ Arianna Huffington has a nice way of going up against the false and fashionable, having written devastating books on feminist excesses and the pretensions of modern art. Now she takes on a really big assignment, the very meaning of life, in *The Fourth Instinct: The Call of the Soul* (Simon & Schuster, 288 pp., $22). Maggie Gallagher reviews it with some sympathy in *National Review*, noting that Huffington raises important questions for a time in which "religion tends to be viewed by intellectual elites as a kind of poison in the body politic." But Ms. Gallagher also has her reservations: "For Mrs. Huffington, all religious truths point to the same truth: 'There is, however, a fundamental difference between today and other historic times of spiritual renewal. Ours does not revolve around any one concept of God or require that we believe in any one set of dogmas, any one doctrine, any one recipe for redemption.' Well maybe. But then again, maybe not. Perhaps God—and Mrs. Huffington never seems to have faced this frightening possibility—actually cares how we envision Him, worship Him, and regulate our lives in His service. Perhaps in religion, as in everything else, it's possible to get it wrong."

■ Editors like to have at the end of a piece a wrap-up sentence with a bit of kick, even if doesn't make too much sense. The President of Harvard, James B. Conant, was heavily involved in, inter alia, the production of the first atomic bomb. In the *New York Review of Books*, Louis Menand examines a new biography of Conant and takes note of the fact that Conant, thinking nuclear war quite likely, wanted to preserve, as best as possible, the record of Western civilization on microfilm and tape. Menand's conclusion: "He had what seems today an almost naive faith in the virtues of the society for which he fought. It does not seem to have crossed his mind that the great works of a civilization that had ended in an act of self-destruction might not be the first thing the survivors of a nuclear holocaust would think it worthwhile to have." Menand's premise would seem to be that *King Lear*, the Mass in B Minor, and *The Federalist* all entailed the inevitability of nuclear self-destruction. Further, one expects that most of what the survivors would think it worthwhile to have would be what was left over from the civilization destroyed, including perhaps the knowledge of nuclear weaponry in order to prevent further destruction. Especially if the Soviet Union was among the survivors. But one should not make too much of Mr. Menand's sniggering at Conant's high estimate of Western civilization. He needed a wrap-up, and a fillip of multicultural snottiness does the job nicely.

■ An Anglican theologian, Andrew Linzey, says it is a "terrible mistake" for the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to draw such a sharp contrast between animals and people. The catechism says that while "it is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly, it is likewise unworthy to spend money on them that should as a priority go to the relief of human misery. One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons." Professor Linzey complains, "A world in which animal cruelty goes unchecked is a morally unsafe world for human beings." Yes, and a world in which the singularity of human dignity and responsibility is not clearly maintained is catastrophic for everyone and everything, including animals. Professor Linzey holds a research fellowship in theology and animal welfare at Mansfield College, Oxford.

■ Living in Japan, Russell Board gets the international edition of *Time* magazine and brings this item to our attention. A story on decline in Eastern Europe concludes, "Eastern Europe's illness is as much of the spirit as of the body. Politicians, not doctors, must cure it." So on that we should offer a comment?

■ One article, even an utterly devastating article, does not a hoax destroy. And so "The Jesus Seminar" is still up to its pranks despite Richard Hays' authoritative exposé, "The Corrected Jesus," in our May issue. Writing in *GQ* magazine, Russell Shorto gives a sad-hilarious account of his experience at one of the seminar's meetings. He is interested also in Paul Verhoeven's plans to produce a film based on the seminar's "findings." Those plans were discussed in the gathering of the seminar fellows. "What would rattle the convent walls is Verhoeven's intention to depict a solely human Jesus on film, and he is using the findings of the Jesus Seminar as the basis for this. '"Fully human" means everything has to be explained on a human scale,' he says. 'You should certainly acknowledge, once and for all, what that means.' In other words, no deus ex machina. The exorcisms and miracles his Jesus performs will lend themselves to more mundane explanations. Assuming it gets made (he has a producer, but the script is still in the works), the film will likely raise a fuss that will make Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* seem about as controversial as *The Love Bug*. After all, the Jesus of *The Last Temptation* was still divine—He just liked girls too. The film session ends with a flurry of possible movie endings that drive home the mortal nature of their subject. Mary Magdalene caressing the lifeless cheek of her teacher. Or what if the body is simply thrown into a pit with others—a no-name burial, as far removed from glorious Resurrection as you can get—and we fade to black? When the [Jesus Seminar] gathering finally breaks up, there is relief on most of the faces. This is hard work, work with an emotional toll. Many of these men are ministers of one kind or

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another who maintain their Christian faith even as they pull the historical rug out from under it. It's a delicate balancing act, one that requires a certain amount of energy, not to say soul-searching. What will the future bring? Will the walls of belief collapse entirely? Will twenty centuries of Western culture be undone in one smart-alecky grunt of scholarship? The fellows insist that this is not their purpose or their desire, that scholarship and religion are two different things that can remain forever separate. But they say it with a catch of nervousness in their throats."

■ Other journalists have usually been admiring, even reverential, toward Murray Kempton. Although relatively few people read Kempton, he's known as a journalist's journalist and his new book, *Rebellions, Perversities, and Main Events* (Times Books), has received a great deal of review attention. Kempton is famous for his long, multi-claused and multi-conditioned, sentences that some call nuanced and others convoluted. Kempton has been doggedly, but not uncritically, a man of the left. Terry Teachout concludes his review in *Commentary* with this: "His understanding of the psychology of American radicalism is profound; his recognition of the complexity of human motivation is astute. But a commentator who so often chooses to paint the world in shades of gray constantly teeters on the edge of suggesting that there is no difference between black and white." Nicely put but not quite right. One recalls, for instance, the 1968 Democratic Convention. Your editor was a delegate from New York and Kempton and he hung out together during those days. Kempton's account of those events, published in the old *Saturday Evening Post*, could hardly have been more morally dichotomous, with bad guys and good guys unambiguously in place (your editor extravagantly depicted as good guy). The truth is that Kempton does paint in black and white as well; the grays come in chiefly when he feels the need to nuance less-seemly aspects of the left to which he was attached during the "class struggle" radicalism of the 1930s. At least in the person of Murray Kempton, it was a radicalism with a measure of intellectual and moral gravitas. W. H. Auden dismissed the thirties as a slum of a decade, and he was probably right. But maybe that marvelous phrase should have been reserved for what was to come. Kempton has done more than his share of slumming, but his prose has always betrayed the fact that he knew, and knows, he doesn't live there.

■ Here's another entry in the growing number of initiatives by black thinkers who have a quite different take on political responsibility in America. *National Minority Politics* is a monthly magazine advancing a program that includes "strong families," "community-based problem solving," and "compassionate conservatism." It's definitely worth a look. For information write *National Minority Politics*, 5757 Westheimer, Suite 3296, Houston, Texas 77057.

■ We note that up in the Midwest this group organized itself as the Catholic Anti-Defamation League. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) protested that they had what is tantamount to a copyright on the term "Anti-Defamation." The Catholics, not wanting to make trouble, changed their name to Catholic Defense League. Now maybe they'll hear from the Jewish Defense League, a far-right group associated with the late Rabbi Meier Kahane. The better and more accurate solution would be for ADL to change its name to Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. At least that is more accurate to the extent that ADL's tactics are represented by *The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance and Pluralism in America*, a 204-page diatribe it issued a few months ago. The book acknowledges its indebtedness to such disinterested sources of information as Americans United for Separation of Church and State, People for the American Way, and the Coalition for Human Dignity (a homosexual lobby). David Cantor, chief author of the book, admits that he did not contact Pat Robertson and other targets of the attack. Columnist Don Feder observes, "The ADL went to the very people who have the most to gain from a credible smear of the religious right without giving those libeled a chance to respond." Of course the ADL is sniffing around for anti-Semitism. And sitting right there is conservative activist Paul Weyrich. On page 97 it is revealed that in 1981 Weyrich's organization published a pamphlet, "How to Become an Effective Grass Roots Lobbyist," written by Warren Richardson who from 1969 to 1973 worked for the Liberty Lobby, "an anti-Semitic organization." Feder comments: "In other words, to tar Weyrich, it uses a brochure produced thirteen years ago by a man who had worked for another organization eight years earlier. The ADL, please understand, is fighting bigotry when it employs McCarthyite tactics." And of course Pat Robertson, despite his vigorous support for Israel, is suspected of anti-Semitism. Feder writes, "Pat Robertson must be an entirely new breed of anti-Semite—an anti-Semite who invites an Orthodox rabbi to address his conventions, has a legal action arm (the American Center for Law and Justice) that filed an amicus brief in support of Hasidic Jews (the *Kiryas Joel* case), and employs a Jew as his chief lobbyist. . . . Here is an anti-Semitism so subtle and insidious that it actually feigns affection for Jews." It may be too early to say that the ADL's defamation of politically active conservative Christians has backfired. But it is noteworthy that Feder is only one of many Jewish voices raised in protest against the book. The ploy of claiming that your political opponents are

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controlled by "religious extremists" puts you in the difficult position of defining terms in a way that makes clear you are not attacking people for being Christian and conservative, which, as it happens, is what most Americans are.

■ The indefatigible Paul Kurtz has launched another volume from his Prometheus Books, *Living Without Religion: Eupraxophy*. Kurtz is the nation's foremost self-identified secular humanist, editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine, and chairman of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). The last brings to mind Chesterton's mot about the problem with those who don't believe in God. The new name for the belief system that Kurtz insists is not a religion is, of course, from the Greek *eu* (good) and *praxis* (practice). For some reason we doubt that "eupraxophy" is going to catch on. The press release accompanying the book refers to his proposal, in what may or may not be a typo, as "expraxophy." As in exit, quickly.

■ The woman from the network calls and wants to know whether I would tape an interview on two religious groups, Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientology. She had heard me say on another network that religion was scandalously under-reported by the news media, and she emphatically agreed. "Journalists don't realize how much religion has to do with the real world," she opined. She knew how to get to me. But why Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientology, I asked. The answer: Yesterday it was reported that Michael Jackson and Lisa-Marie Presley, daughter of the revenant, got married, the one a Jehovah's Witness and the other a Scientologist. "Viewers would like to know how their religious beliefs might affect their marriage." Take this as further evidence in support of the claim that the news media are becoming more attentive to the importance of religion to "the real world."

■ More and more of these stories are coming in. Mr. S. of Baton Rouge writes that it is putting a serious strain on their marriage. Apparently Mrs. S. routinely gets to the mailbox first and immediately settles down with the new issue for as long as five or six hours. Even more irritating to Mr. S. is his wife's habit of chuckling or making comments to herself while she is reading the issue, and he hasn't the foggiest notion of what's so interesting. Mrs. L. of Chicago has it worse. It seems that Mr. L. not only grabs the issue for himself but he then wants to discuss items in the issue with Mrs. L. when he knows perfectly well she hasn't had a chance to read them. "Once a month, at least for a few hours," Mrs. L. writes, "he is able to gloat that he knows more than I do." The editors are distressed by stories such as the above, and we believe we have a solution. Perhaps these marriages can be saved by getting two copies each month. To give your spouse his or her own subscription, write FIRST THINGS Marriage Savers, 156 Fifth Ave., Suite 400, New York, NY 10010, and enclose a check for $20, which is $9 off the regular subscription price. Others talk about the alarming divorce rate. FIRST THINGS is doing something about it.

Sources: Richard Rorty quoted in *University of Chicago Magazine*, April 1994.

WHILE WE'RE AT IT: Habermas quoted on socialism in *New York Review of Books*, March 24, 1994. On organization S.H.E.E.P. at Harvard, *Rothbard-Rockwell Report*, June 1994. On Pentti Linkola and Garret Hardin, *Wall Street Journal*, May 20, 1994. Maggie Gallagher on Arianna Huffington, *National Review*, July 11, 1994. Louis Menand on James B. Conant, *New York Review of Books*, July 14, 1994. Andrew Linzey on cruelty to animals, *Tablet* June 18, 1994. On spiritual health of Eastern Europe, *Time*, June 27, 1994. Russell Shorto on the Jesus Seminar, *GQ*, June 1994. Terry Teachout on Murray Kempton, *Commentary*, July 1994. Don Feder on ADL, *Human Events*, July 1, 1994.

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SHOULD JEWS FEAR THE "CHRISTIAN RIGHT"?

On June 9, 1994, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) issued a report entitled *The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance & Pluralism in America.* We are a group of Jews who wish to make it known that we reject the implications of this report and deplore its publication.

We do not question that it is the proper role of the Anti-Defamation League to identify the enemies of the Jewish community. Jewish tradition, and indeed Jewish law, demand that the first concern of our communal organizations be the protection and survival of the community.

But the so-called "evidence" of a conservative Christian threat to Jewish security is derived from such discreditable techniques as insinuation and guilt by association. Thus the report uses the words and actions of a few marginal extremists to impeach individuals and groups whose only crime seems to be the seriousness with which they act on their Christian convictions.

It ill behooves an organization dedicated to fighting against defamation to engage in defamation of its own.

Insofar as the objections to the religious Right are honestly presented in the ADL report, they are mainly political ones: Christian conservatives advocate positions that run counter to many people's beliefs about such issues as abortion, school prayer, homosexual rights, and the meaning of the First Amendment.

And not only do Christian conservatives advocate these positions, but in recent years they have begun to organize, publicize, and attempt to elect candidates sympathetic to their views. This is no different from what many other groups, including Christian liberals, have always done. By what proper definition of the term, then, does the political activity of Christian conservatives constitute an assault on pluralism?

The separation of church and state is not the same thing as the elimination of religious values and concepts from political discourse.

Moreover, Judaism is not, as the ADL seems to suggest, coextensive with liberalism. Nor, we wish to emphasize, does the Jewish community speak with one voice on the religious and moral—and political—issues of our time.

Above all, on the issue with which this community does speak in one voice, namely, the survival of Israel, the Jews have no more stalwart friends than evangelical Christians. Judaism teaches the principle of *Hakarat Hatov*, that we have the duty to acknowledge the good done to us. In issuing *The Religious Right* the ADL has among other things seriously violated that principle.

For all these reasons, we call on our fellow Jews to reject this study. As a people whose history so vividly illustrates the bitter results of bigotry, we have a special obligation to guard against it, and all the more so when, as in the case of the ADL attack on our Christian fellow citizens, it emanates from within our own community.

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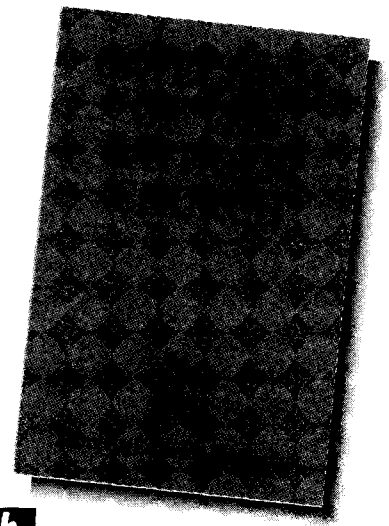

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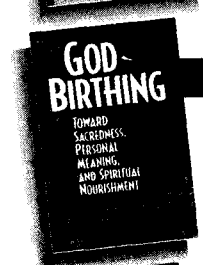

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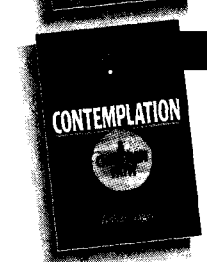

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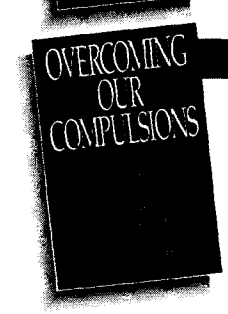

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